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Monsters and the Monstrous

November 2012, Volume 2, N^o. 2

ISSN: 1756-770X

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Subscriptions

The journal is published twice yearly in May and November. Standard subscriptions are for 2 volumes per year. Subscription rates for 2012-2013 are:

Individual Subscription: £39.95

Institutional Subscription: £79.95

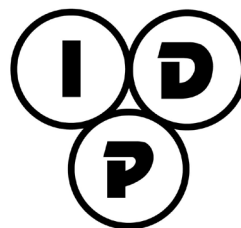
Single Issue Purchase per Edition: £25.95

Subscriptions available at:

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Monsters and the Monstrous

Volume 2 Number 2 November 2012

Special Issue

'The Twilight Saga and Pedagogy'

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Teaching Stephenie Meyer's Twilight Saga

Cristina Santos, Adriana Spahr and Jonathan A. Allan

Key Words: Stephenie Meyer, Twilight Saga, Monster Theory, pedagogy, literary and cultural studies, genre, romance, gender studies, myth and religion

Adaptation, like evolution, is a transgenerational phenomenon.... Stories do get retold in different ways in new material and cultural environments; like genes, they adapt to those new environments *by virtue of* mutation—in their ‘offspring’ or their adaptations. And the fittest do more than survive; they flourish.¹

The act of teaching, as all teachers know, is never entirely easy, never without doubts and questions, and never entirely and hopelessly lost. Teachers teach, but teachers also, we believe, think carefully about how they teach, what they teach, and why they teach—and this volume is surely a testament to these ideals. This special volume of *Monsters and the Monstrous* considers how we might begin to think about, write about and theorise monstrosity and its place in the classroom.

After several years of teaching and researching monstrous women, Cristina Santos, one of our guest editors for this issue, developed a graduate course dedicated to The Twilight Saga. The course syllabus was designed predominantly around the very questions that Stephenie Meyer posed, through the voice of Bella Swan in *New Moon*,

Could a world exist where ancient legends went wandering around the borders of tiny, insignificant towns, facing down mythical monsters? Did this mean every impossible fairy tale was grounded somewhere in absolute truth? Was there anything sane or normal at all, or was everything just magic and ghost stories?²

These questions—literary, epistemological, socio-cultural, historical, political—motivated the impetus for the course, which aimed to look at the presence of legends, mythical monsters, and the impossible fairy tales that populated Meyer's Twilight Saga. The course was additionally divided into areas of theoretical interests that considered: genre, (post)feminism, virginity and abstinence, intertextuality and adaptation, and literary history.³ Seminar discussions and lectures recognised many of the allusions to fairy tales ranging from ‘Sleeping Beauty’ to ‘Little Red Riding Hood’; or the numerous Shakespearean references from *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*; the multiplicity of religious images, especially the Judeo-Christian and Mormon traditions; and the continual references to what might be called in the Jungian mode of the ‘cultural unconscious’ ranging from archetypes to Greek myth to the mythologies of popular culture. Intrinsic to this course was a belief that we must treat popular literature seriously, that is, as Northrop Frye has written, ‘popular literature [...] is neither better nor worse than elite literature, nor is it really a different kind of literature.’⁴ This course, thus, approached popular

literature seriously, respectfully, closely, and critical, and in spite of aesthetic and canonical value judgments.

The course itself adopted an innovative and experimental approach insofar as it aimed to draw on as many perspectives as possible, and therefore students were encouraged to actively draw on their own ‘cultural baggage’ or ‘prefiguration’ as Paul Ricoeur might call it.⁵ The course made use of guest lecturers, who also read the entire course readings, while at the same time delivering a curriculum that focussed on the professionalisation of the graduate students. Students began their final research projects by developing an abstract that was then expanded into a conference length paper and then finally an article-length essay. The quality and innovation of the topics presented by the students stimulated a discussion amongst the editors about the possibility of sharing this pedagogical experience, in particular, we wanted to publish a collection of critical essays not just on *The Twilight Saga*, but also about teaching the Saga and being students in a course about the Saga. That being said, this issue includes articles by Heidi Horvath and Laura Purdy, and a book review by Monica Dufault. Two other students—Steven Rita-Procter and Monica Dufault—have already published their term papers (now articles) with Inter-Disciplinary.Net in an upcoming volume from the 9th meeting of the *Monsters and the Monstrous* conference held at Oxford University in 2011.

To these ends, we the editors, sought papers that considered *The Twilight Saga*, which we felt formed a part of the cultural zeitgeist of the student experience in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Thus, as much as we are interesting in questioning and considering the place of monster studies in the classroom, we were equally interested in the problematics of teaching popular culture, particularly a text *as* popular as *The Twilight Saga*. Naturally, there are not ‘new’ questions (nor do we pretend that they are), but they are nonetheless important questions about the profession and the research we conduct and the subjects we teach.

This volume of *Monsters and the Monstrous*, the editorial board hopes, will encourage us as scholars of monstrosity, to consider new and innovative ways in which we might begin to establish monster studies in both our own research *as well as the pedagogical space of the classroom*. For the field to genuinely establish itself, it must transcend the specificity of individual research interests. If there is one thing that has been resoundingly clear at Inter-Disciplinary.Net, it is that there must be an intimate relation between research and the classroom. Therefore, this issue explores how research enters the classroom, and how the classroom can become a fertile space in which we can work collaboratively to explore germane theoretical, cultural, historical questions, which more often than not help us to understand better our own contexts. To these ends, we present an issue of the journal that includes articles written by students who have taken a class on *The Twilight Saga* to early career researchers considering how *Twilight* might be utilised in the classroom, to professors who have taught and reflected on how they taught it. We are thus delighted to present a series of articles that serendipitously seem to feed off of one another, and more contribute to a growing dialogue on *The Twilight Saga*.

What is interesting about these papers is how often they return to one another, or how often they seem to flirt with one another. This is interesting because all of these papers were, so far as we know, written in isolation (like so much academic research). But these papers also comment on the state of disciplines outside of monster studies, for instance, the love story is a concern in many papers, and while some writers go to the ‘canonical’ voices of the romance, for instance, Janice Radway,⁶ others pursue new ways of exploring the romance.⁷ This is important because it shows the vivaciousness of not only our own field of monster studies, but also the growing interest in love stories. But, while speaking about love, for instance, many of the studies included herein, look further to the psychological or towards feminist and even post-feminist readings of this same problem. We are very excited by this, by the recognition that a love story is about so much more than just a tired and clichéd narrative. Instead, *Twilight*, even

if nothing more than a romance novel (as though there really is nothing more than just a romance novel), is actively engaging in its own critiques, The Twilight Saga is sufficiently complex, sufficiently nuanced, sufficiently rebellious to warrant study. In many regards, these studies follow Pamela Regis's argument that 'we owe the romance at least an acknowledgment that many readers, writers, and, yes, even some critics do find the romance novel complex' and moreover, all seem to follow Regis's advice that, 'a critic confronted with a text that she considers simple should be careful of the conclusions that she draws in working on that text.'⁸ What is clear in each of these studies is that The Twilight Saga is never dismissed as 'simple' or lacking in 'complexity.' Quite the contrary. Indeed, the editors are especially pleased that this is the case, and we are pleased that each of the contributors, even in their discomfort with sparkling vampires, continued to read the Saga and treat the text respectfully, closely, and carefully.

Our special issue opens with critical analyses and explorations of The Twilight Saga. The first article by Elizabeth Eowyn Nelson, 'Seeing and Being Seen: The Individualization of Bella Swan,' which is a psychoanalytical and literary informed reading of the Saga. In this essay Nelson argues that Bella's relationship to Edward and the entire Cullen clan is characterized by a longing to be seen and to experience genuine connection with another in a fragmented world. This longing, as discussed by Nelson, is non-sexual in nature and is crucial to questioning what other longing is satisfied when the characters abstain from sex.

Kathy McKay and Myfanwy Maple in 'Vampires Love Differently from Humans: What does Bella Teach Us about (Un)Orthodox Love in The Twilight Series?' takes the reader beyond the question of 'longing' and explores three broad themes regarding the lessons Bella teaches about love within The Twilight Saga. These three themes are: 1) Love is passive; 2) Love is everything; and, 3) Love is enhanced by anger, pain and violence. In the end, the authors propose to answer the question if Bella's lessons about love are even applicable to young women today. However, Jonathan A. Allan's article 'Isn't that Enough?: On Love in The Twilight Saga', describes the Saga as sharing much in common with the popular romance novel and how love functions in the Meyer's Saga. Allan provides his readers with a critical reading informed by critical theory and literary analysis of Edward's love for Bella as an essentially narcissistic love, which ultimately is less about loving and more about being loved.

The final paper of this section is appropriately entitled 'Stephenie Meyer's Twilight Saga and the End of History', and takes us beyond questions of the love and longing as explored by the earlier contributors, yet continues in the tradition of romance by focusing on the happily-ever-after. Here, Robert Tindol focuses his study of *Breaking Dawn* on the subtle themes of the agelessness and eternal beauty of vampires as a metaphor for the 'end of history,' (a term coined by economist Francis Fukuyama in his controversial 1992 book of the same name). Tindol concludes that if the end of history is the end of narrative, then Bella Swan's world will come to have an 'end of history' only if the storytelling ceases. That is, will there be a 'happily-ever-after' (an end to the narrative) or will the happy vampire family continue to be threatened by the external forces of 'evil' vampires?

In the second section of this issue, contributors explicitly focus on the pedagogical questions surrounding The Twilight Saga. In particular, we open with articles by Natalie Wilson and Amanda Firestone, both who have taught The Twilight Saga. Our first is by Natalie Wilson entitled 'Utilizing *Twilight* in the Classroom to Get Students Hooked on Feminism'. In her article Wilson approaches *Twilight* within the area of Women Studies, an academic discipline intrinsically devoted to the study of female roles and contributions to society and culture. She delves into the topic not only as a pedagogical exercise, but as one that intersects with race, class, and sexuality. The second article on pedagogy, "'I Was With Edward in My Happy Place": The Romance of The Twilight Saga as a Aca-Fan' by Amanda Firestone explores the

ways that her fandom informs and shapes her research in the fields of Communication and Critical Cultural Studies, as well as her pedagogical style. Moreover, she discusses how *Twilight* aids her in teaching concepts about romance and gendered relationships.

The following two articles by Laura Purdy and Heidi Horvath—two students from Santos’ class on *Twilight*—examine the relationship between Edward and Bella by comparing and contrasting it to the superhero archetype and the mythological figures of Eros and Psyche, respectively. Purdy focuses on Bella’s romanticised image of Edward as a ‘hero’ in which his superhuman status can be read as an appropriation of such iconic superheroes as Batman, Superman and Spiderman. On the other hand, Horvath compares and contrasts the *Twilight* ‘love story’ (as outlined earlier by Allan, and McKay and Maple) from an alchemical perspective in which Edward’s numinous qualities are contrasted with those of the god Eros and Bella’s and Psyche’s journey ends in their drastic transformations.

We certainly do not intend for this issue to put an end to discussions of The Twilight Saga, and we hope, above all, that this special issue will provoke future special issues on popular novels, films, and culture in relation to the important work that we all do as researchers and teachers.

Notes

¹ Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 32.

² Stephenie Meyer, *New Moon* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2006), 293-294.

³ The course ‘Crossover Literature: Legends, Myths and Fairy Tales in The Twilight Saga’ (SCLA 5P60) was taught as part of the course offerings in the Master’s program in Studies in Comparative Literatures and the Arts at Brock University in winter 2010. The specific areas of study were:

- The Overcrowded Genre: Romance, Fairy Tale, and Myth
- *Twilight* and (Post)Feminism
- *Twilight* and the Virginity/Abstinence Movement: Bella
- *Twilight* and the Virginity/Abstinence Movement: Edward and Jacob
- *Twilight*: Religion, Mythology and Legends
- *Twilight* and Fairy Tales
- *Twilight* and Literary Intertextuality
- *Twilight* and Adaptation: The Graphic Novel
- *Twilight* and Adaptation: The Movies.

⁴ Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture and Other Writings on Critical Theory 1976-1991*, ed. Joseph Adamson and Jean Wilson, Vol. 18 of *Collected Works of Northrop Frye*, ed. Alvin A. Lee (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 23.

⁵ See Paul Ricoeur *Time and Narrative Vol. I*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

⁶ Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarch, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

⁷ The study of ‘romance novels’ has grown significantly since the publication of Radway’s *Reading the Romance*. Pamela Regis’s *A Natural History of the Romance Novel* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), for instance, has urged scholars to think carefully and critically about the romance novel, recognising its place in literary history, and how the romance novel functions structurally. Laura Vivanco’s *For Love and Money: The Literary Art of the Harlequin Mills and Boon* (Tirril: Humanities Ebooks, 2011), offers a strong defence of the romance novel as a work of literary art, she pays particular attention to modes, metaphors,

structure, and metafiction. Sarah S. G. Frantz and Eric Selinger published *New Approaches to Popular Romance Fiction* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2012), an important collection of essays on popular romance fiction, which openly asks its readers and fellow critics of the romance to recognise the complexity and diversity of romance fiction. Arguably, Janice Radway's seminal *Reading the Romance* allowed for the field of 'popular romance studies' to grow, and current scholars are now afforded an incredibly rich array of scholarly materials on popular romance. Additionally, the study of popular romance also enjoys a peer-reviewed *Journal of Popular Romance Studies*, which is devoted to the study of 'representations of romantic love in popular media, now and in the past, from anywhere in the world'

⁸ Pamela Regis. 'What do Critics Owe the Romance?' *Journal of Popular Romance Studies* 2.1 (2011): No pagination, online: http://jprstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/JPRS2.1_Regis_Keynote.pdf.

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Cristina Santos is an Associate Professor at Brock University in Canada who teaches in the Department of Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures and in the MA program in Studies in Comparative Literatures and Arts. Her publications demonstrate a special affinity to researching monstrous women in literature and the arts.

Adriana Spahr received her Ph.D. from the University of Toronto, Canada. She is currently Assistant Professor in the Department of Humanities at Grant MacEwan University in Canada. Her scholarly interests focus on the cultural, political and historical components in Latin American and Spanish literatures. Her current research is focused on the use of the ‘monstrous’ as an element of control in the Latin American society.

Jonathan A. Allan teaches in the Gender and Women’s Studies Program at Brandon University in Canada. He has published articles on a variety of themes ranging from Northrop Frye’s influence on Harold Bloom, to male virginity in popular romance novels, to the legend of Erszebet Bathory in Argentine and French Literature. His research has been published in the *University of Toronto Quarterly*, *Journal of Popular Romance Studies*, and *Canadian Review for Comparative Literature*.

SO READY FOR THIS TO BE THE END,
FOR THIS TO BE THE TWILIGHT OF YOUR LIFE,
THOUGH YOUR LIFE HAS
BARELY STARTED.
YOU'RE READY TO
GIVE UP YOUR
BRAIN!?



WHAT TWILIGHT WOULD BE LIKE IF EDWARD
WAS A ZOMBIE.

Seeing and Being Seen: The Individuation of Bella Swan

Elizabeth Eowyn Nelson

Abstract

This article asks the question, is the narrative frame of *The Twilight Saga* sufficiently large and complex to support thoughtful reflection upon, and critical discussion of, the values encoded in the texts? The answer is yes. The wide range of critical responses to the *Saga* support more nuanced readings of its themes, plot, and characters, helping the audience, particularly adolescents, negotiate key issues in their own lives. Subtle analysis of the *Saga*'s protagonist Bella Swan is especially important because research suggests that many female fans identify with her. Thus it is important to see Bella as more than the simple, malleable, powerless young woman she often is made out to be. This article demonstrates that she is a complex character, awkward, passive, and weak, and also bold, perceptive, and tough. Over the course of the four novels, Bella individuates in relationship to the Cullen family, who view her as a daughter and sister. They satisfy Bella's longing to be seen deeply and appreciatively, an example of sustained, patient attention that serves as a poignant critique of human life in today's manic, fragmented, and increasingly lonely world. The Cullen's ability to appreciate Bella's manifest character and to nurture her latent potential far better than her well-meaning but inept parents is pivotal to the plot. Nurtured by this supernatural family, Bella takes a leading role at the key dramatic moments in the first three novels, when the Cullen's existence is at stake, and most particularly in the final book when Bella's mental quirk—the ability to shield her mind from others' attempt to read and influence her—is named for what it is: a formidable power all her own.

Key Words: Adolescence, Bella Swan, individuation, psychological development, romance, sexuality, supernatural, *Twilight Saga*, vampires, young adult fiction.

1. Introduction

Nearly 25 years before the publication of *Twilight*, the first novel in Stephenie Meyer's bestselling *Saga* that was published in 2005, vampire scholar James Twitchell said, 'I couldn't care less about the current generation of vampires: personally, I find them rude, boring, and hopelessly adolescent.'¹ And to think: he hadn't yet seen the likes of Edward Cullen, the sparkling, bronze-haired demi-god of 21st-century vampire fiction.

Though many vampire purists would agree with Twitchell, others find the newest rendering of the archetypal vampire to be a noteworthy mirror held up to contemporary culture. In fact, the archetypal vampire has persisted across time and culture in large part *because* it can flexibly adapt to reflect our current fears and desires. 'Mutability is its strength,' says Nina Auerbach.² Vampires emerge in various guises—some easily recognized, some not—in an intoxicating combination of dread and allure. 'Their variety makes them survivors,' says Auerbach.³ Joan Gordon and Victoria Hollinger agree. The impact of the vampire is due to its being not an actual physical being 'but something much more powerful, a creature who can take on the allegorical weight of changing times and collective psyches. Like all our monsters, vampires 'help us construct our own humanity, to provide guidelines against which we can define ourselves'.⁴ Author Suzy McKee Charnas makes a similar point: 'The monster shows up

the monstrosity of true human evil, as well as calling forth to match that evil the full exercise of human virtue – the courage, the compassion, and the steadfastness’.⁵

Twitchell would likely agree that the archetypal vampire is powerful, alluring, and dreadful, a versatile monster that allows us to more clearly see and construct our humanity. He has tremendous respect for the vampire, calling it

one of the major mythic figures bequeathed to us by the English Romantics. Simply in terms of cultural influence and currency, the vampire is far more important than any of the other nineteenth-century archetypes... in fact, probably the most enduring and prolific mythic figure we have.⁶

There can be little doubt that the vampire’s cultural influence and currency is on the rise, and not only in the Young Adult (YA) fiction market where *The Twilight Saga* dominates. Yet kneejerk disdain for the adolescent vampire, exemplified by Twitchell, is not helpful. Regardless of how we judge the quality of *The Twilight Saga* as literature, its popularity is a noteworthy cultural event. The series has sold more than 100 million copies around the world, spawned numerous fan sites and other fan-based activities, and inspired the highly successful films that transformed Summit Entertainment into an influential Hollywood studio.⁷ Each of these media—the novels, the web sites, and the films—are texts, and ‘texts, as cultural productions, display the concerns of their contemporary times in ways that often bypass authorial intent’.⁸ They should not be ignored.⁹ Nonetheless we may well ask, is the commercial success and contemporary popularity of *The Twilight Saga* enough to justify teaching it? That is the central question driving this volume of articles, and it is an important one. Let us restate it this way: *Is the narrative frame of The Twilight Saga sufficiently large and complex to support thoughtful reflection upon, and critical discussion of, the values encoded in the texts?*

Even a quick glance through the available *Twilight* criticism supplies the answer: a resounding yes. Though the scholarly response is still fairly recent, we now have a few good collections of critical articles and book-length studies, as well as a growing number of articles published in peer-reviewed academic journals. Furthermore, *Twilight* fan sites offer an occasionally thoughtful critical discussion of the writing, plot, themes, and characters, constituting an important strand in the dialogue. Natalie Wilson, who authors one of the few scholarly blogs about *Twilight*, puts it best when she says that fans ‘are active readers who often reject and/or transform the Saga’s more delimiting undertones’.¹⁰ This notion accords with recent research into the relationship between text and reader generally, and young readers in particular. According to Charles Sarland, the tweens and teens reading YA novels are not mindless dupes, but instead use ‘the fiction that they enjoy as one element in that negotiation of cultural meaning and value.’¹¹

I align myself with Wilson, who advocates teaching *Twilight* to ‘engage in discussions about what the popularity of the series means and to forge ways to respond to the zeitgeist that promotes analysis and critical discussion’.¹² In other words, let us assume that the texts are complex and contradictory—growing out of and reflecting back contemporary anxieties about age, sex, gender, power, wealth, status, love, loneliness, otherness, commitment, sacrifice, and identity, to name but a few themes in *The Twilight Saga*—and read carefully, critically, and well. In the end, we may hear *Twilight* as a living polyphonic voice that has much to say about the contemporary world. At the very least, we will be in conversation with the young people for whom the novels are ostensibly written¹³ as they enter a particularly intense phase of their individuation journey, anxious and excited about who they are and what the future holds. The term *individuation*, which has passed into common usage, arises from the analytical psychology

of Carl Jung. It refers to ‘the optimum development of the whole individual human being,’¹⁴ a process that continues throughout life. In the words of James Hillman, it affirms that each of us ‘bears a uniqueness that asks to be lived and that is already present before it can be lived.’¹⁵ The *Twilight* Saga demonstrates that whereas individuation depends upon differentiating oneself from others to discover our irreplaceable uniqueness, it also requires others to assist this process of discovery. Those who offer us their full and loving attention, whether they are parents, teachers, friends, lovers or mentors, bear witness to our steps toward individuation and celebrate it.

2. The Allure of the Supernatural

The concept of the vampire arises from the potent belief in life after death and the magical power of blood.¹⁶ The first belief seems to reflect our inability to grasp the idea of abject nothingness where a loved one or an enemy once was. Nor do we seem content, at least in our fiction, with lives that are bounded by ordinary, consensual reality. As Tanya Erzen points out, ‘*Twilight* and other recent vampire books assume the supernatural as a facet of everyday life ... [such] that the boundary between the paranormal and the everyday world is porous.’¹⁷ Fleur Diamond makes a similar observation. The ‘burgeoning sub-genre of Young Adult supernatural romance, in the wake of Meyer’s success, also hints at the special appeal that these narratives hold for their young, predominantly female, readership’.¹⁸ The vampire, along with werewolf and the zombie, transgress ontological categories, mocking our ability to precisely measure what is human. But unlike the zombie, vampires always are ‘an irrepressible force whose dynamic energy is profoundly attractive.’¹⁹ Alert, restless, and hungry, with a predator’s spooky stillness and keen instincts, vampires survive only by feeding on the blood of the living. In vampire lore, blood becomes a symbol not only of basic biological life, but of psychological and erotic potency. Moreover, the vampire’s need for blood easily fits Freud’s description of the uncanny, which he defines as something at once familiar and strange. Simply, the experience of feeding on another—or, if one is female, having another feed upon us—has a firm basis in our biology. We all fed off the life blood of our mothers at one time. Vampirism retains many of the qualities of its biological ground, including love and the willingness to sacrifice oneself for the beloved.

Stillness and alluring grace are two hallmarks of our seductive literary vampires. Leonard Wolf alludes to this:

A vampire bends over his or her victim; there is a not particularly painful little bite, and the victim’s face takes on a look of bliss. How different—and to some readers, how soothingly different—that is from the usual and essentially awkward tumults of sex.²⁰

Add to this the intoxicating properties of eternal physical youth combined with ageless wisdom, and insatiable sexual appetite allied to consummate skill, and you have an erotic monster ‘to die for’ symbolically and perhaps literally as well. The unique twist that *The Twilight Saga* adds to this mix is sexual abstinence between Bella and Edward. Throughout three of the four novels, the couple enacts the tension of opposing forces, erotic desire and the effort to keep it in check.²¹ Part of the story’s appeal is witnessing this tension, an ethical drama that is played out intra-psychically as an internal struggle within the person, and inter-psychically, as a struggle between them. Edward’s supernatural strength renders even a momentary failure of control absolutely lethal.²² This intensifies the eroticism, such that the simultaneous expression and containment of their desire is portrayed as emotional and physical agony. Because it is the couples’ first experience of love and lust, it is also bewildering.

Bella's obsession with Edward has attracted the attention of several thoughtful critics as well as thoughtful and critical fans of *The Twilight Saga*. For instance, Hannah Shachar says that Bella's blankness in *New Moon* highlights her lack 'of self-identity or belonging without Edward and the world he can create for her,' so that she exemplifies the traditionally passive feminine character who can only be 'defined in relation to the masculine'.²³ The Saga 'ultimately recycles traditional notions of love, masculinity and femininity for the contemporary age, rather than re-evaluating them and offering a more complex version of gender relations'.²⁴ Elizabeth Hand, reviewing the entire saga in *The Washington Post*, remarks that 'there's something distinctly queasy about the male female dynamic that emerges over the series' 2,446 pages. Edward ... talks and acts like an obsessively controlling adult male.²⁵

There is little question that Edward is protective in the extreme, even controlling. Yet Bella's much-discussed obsession with Edward—her willingness to die for him—is clearly matched by his obsession with her, a point that attracts less critical attention. For instance, the major theme running through Meyer's second novel, *New Moon*, is Edward's sympathy with Romeo, who so easily kills himself once he discovers Juliet's seemingly dead body. Edward sees no point in living in a world without Bella, and he tells her so. The frailty of human flesh, in this instance, is a distinct advantage since the suicide of a vampire is so much more difficult. From one perspective, this balanced obsession renders *The Twilight Saga* more subversive than many commentators believe. After all, if we momentarily set aside the fact that Edward views Bella as his soul mate, someone to assuage his century of loneliness, she arguably has much more to gain by her alliance with the Cullen family than Edward has by allying himself with a human girl. Diamond suggests this when she says that 'Bella stays with Edward, obsessively, because he gives her access to a freedom not available in her ordinary life'.²⁶ Yet even Diamond, who reads Bella so well, understates the case. It is not just that Edward offers Bella freedom she cannot find in her ordinary life.²⁷ As a vampire Bella also will gain the beauty, power, grace, and heightened senses of a natural predator, the chance to extend herself intellectually, culturally, and emotionally while retaining the physical suppleness of youth, all supported by the vast wealth and security of the Cullen's luxurious material existence. And, to paraphrase the smart, acerbic, and resourceful Sookie Stackhouse from *True Blood*, since Edward is a vampire, Bella has nothing *but* a future with him.

3. Negotiating the Tricky Terrain of Love

For Bella, negotiating the different meanings of that small word 'love' in the relationships with Edward and Jacob dramatizes the more torturous aspects of adolescence. And that is not all. In addition to differentiating her feelings for Edward and Jacob, she must also find ways to protect her caring but inept parents, especially when they are oblivious to, yet in danger from, the vampires and werewolves that are an integral part of Bella's life. Bella also must fit in with yet keep secrets from her mostly oblivious high school friends. Finally, she feels torn by her loyalty to and loving feelings for her two larger families, Jacob's Quilute tribe and the Cullen clan, who are natural enemies also attempting to negotiate a communal truce. For Bella, this amounts to trying to step into her future as a vampire, wholly committed to and beloved by the Cullens, without alienating and ultimately losing her original family, including Renee and Charlie, her father's long-time friend Billy Black, and his son Jacob, her only childhood companion in Forks. In some ways Bella's story is rendered simple by the clarity and strength of her love for Edward. Nonetheless, the emotional conflicts she faces are enough to challenge someone far older and more experienced than Bella. And, as Bella well knows, what is at stake is not just who she loves at 17 or 18, but who she will become the rest of her existence.

It is precisely here that many critics seem to underestimate the romance genre in general and *The Twilight Saga* in particular. The romance genre is defined by its emphasis on a love story. When it is well done it demonstrates how complex, troubling, and difficult it is to navigate love's conflicts, competing loyalties, secrets, and revelations, and how each choice—who to love or not, how to love and when, whether to close oneself off defensively or risk vulnerability—can have significant, lasting consequences. For tween and teen readers of the novels, the literal life-and-death struggle that Bella repeatedly faces in the novels, due in part to their supernatural elements, echo with the ring of emotional truth. Adolescence, as a stage of life, is characterized by an emotional intensity that is often frightening to both the young people experiencing it and the adults trying to understand and guide them. In his fine exploration of the adolescent psyche, Richard Frankel shows that 'adolescents are viscerally affected by an awareness of mortality,' including the symbolic death of childhood, and that 'death imagery ... pervades consciousness during this time.'²⁸ For adult readers, Bella's struggles may recall an intense stage of life, a relic of the past. Whether that relic is a treasure they long to recover or something they are glad to have put away is an interesting question. I surmise that most of us have ambivalent feelings about adolescence: it remains, for many adults, a mysterious moment in our lives when so much of our identity was at stake. We may not remember, or we may choose not to remember, just how tumultuous our teenage years were—or, conversely, how numb we may have become in response to the overwhelming intensity.²⁹ Watching Bella, Edward, and Jacob negotiate this tricky time may remind us of our own stories.

Yet as several critics have correctly observed, it is the romance elements in Meyer's novels that deserve thoughtful critical attention. In Janice Radway's 1984 study, she partly attributes the perennial appeal of romance to its simplicity. Such novels rely 'on standard cultural codes' whose historical or cultural relativity is never questioned.³⁰ In Fuchs' 2004 study of the genre, she says that romance narratives are 'often organized around a quest, whether for love or adventure, and involves a variety of marvelous elements'.³¹ The novels fit both definitions quite well, and can justly be interpreted as part of a broad neo-conservative backlash against feminism and other liberationist movements that have questioned, and helped to erode, patriarchal and heteronormative cultural values. For instance, Bonnie Mann says that as a character, Bella is 'the locus of exaggerated stereotypically feminine incapacities and self-loathing'.³² Similarly, Anna Mukherjee argues that 'the overt message of *The Twilight saga* as very much in line with the defence of the conservative, Christian, heterosexually married family *over and against other ways of living and loving*'.³³ Ashley Donnelly states this argument most strongly:

The world-wide popularity of Meyer's series and its now ubiquitous presence in popular culture illuminates the ease with which audiences are willing to accept the physical, emotional, and sexual dominance of men over women, the exclusion of all peoples that do not abide by the heteronormative pair-bonding dichotomy, and the restrictive moralizing of heteronormative patriarchy. To allow such 'entertainment' to escape critical attention would ensure that these oppressive ideologies ingrain themselves in the collective subconscious.³⁴

While I find some of these passionate feminist responses a bit monotonous in their interpretation, the evidence supporting their point of view cannot be faulted. Frankly, Bella's continual self-loathing in the novels is as tedious as some of the critical ire she arouses. This is a point made by Diamond in one of the most nuanced readings I have yet encountered:

Told in the voice of her heroine, Meyer's text rehearses many of the key aspects of the classic romance that disempower women and merely reinforce the heteronormative vision of desire. Bella is by no means a feminist character; she does not analyse her life in terms of gender politics and defers opportunities for a college education and a career. Bella is positioned as a classic, passive romantic heroine.³⁵

Upon Bella's arrival in Forks, she simply steps into the role of homemaker to her father Charlie, allows Edward to become her entire world while tolerating his controlling behaviour, and remains mystified about how such a superior being could love her in the first place. Moreover, what Bella chooses to do with the enormous freedom, power, and wealth she gains as a result of her transformation into an elegant supernatural being is decidedly traditional. On the surface, *The Twilight Saga* reads like a social conservative's wet dream.

But it would be a mistake to read the texts or Bella reductively because neither supports one view of the world or one set of values. Though Bella is no feminist, 'she continues to navigate her fears, desires, and responsibilities, gaining greater power and agency with each text'.³⁶ In fact, from the first novel she is a paradoxical combination of obstinately blind about herself and surprisingly perceptive about others. She is thoughtful, compassionate, and willing to admit when she has misjudged someone. If only she were as generous toward herself as she is to others. Sadly, she is an exemplar of the low self-esteem that affects so many adolescent girls.³⁷

To read Bella well, we must see beyond Bella's own limited self-perception, seeing her more completely than she sees herself. She is a vulnerable and loving young woman who develops, over time and through adversity, a surprising core of resilience. She also is disciplined, focused, perceptive and intelligent—and she knows it. For instance, in the first novel, when Bella and Edward pair up for their biology test and finish first, she resents the fact that others assume their success is entirely due to Edward's ability.³⁸ Furthermore, Bella has a keen strategic mind. She comes up with the complex plan to rescue her mother Renee from the vampire James at the end of the first novel. As far as plans go, it is nearly flawless and it nearly works. The Cullens, though at first surprised by Bella's plan, listen carefully and agree to her idea. Bella even earns Emmett's approbation as 'diabolical'.³⁹ Bella also is resolute, brave, and determined, heroic qualities essential to rescuing Edward from his suicidal mission to the Volturi at the climax of the second novel, *New Moon*. As before, it is the Cullens who see *this* Bella, knowing full well that her devotion to Edward combined with her odd quirk—the ability to shield her thoughts—is precisely the asset they need. Alice, who accompanies her to Italy, indeed, finances the trip and makes it logistically possible, tells Jasper 'I think Bella is the only chance'. Shortly thereafter, she tells Bella 'if there were any way to do this without you, Bella, I wouldn't be endangering you like this'.⁴⁰ In the third novel, *Eclipse*, Bella again provides the decisive insight. She puts together the disparate clues to understand that the rash of murders in Seattle, the unfamiliar vampire who invaded her home, and Victoria's menacing presence near Forks, are all part of one related pattern. The Cullens listen attentively and respectfully, never dismissing her as merely human, which would be a form of species arrogance, or as merely female, the kind of patriarchal misogyny we might expect from a text that only supports conservative social values. With this quality of being seen, particularly in contrast to the haphazard attention Bella's own parents provide, is it any surprise that Bella falls in love with the entire Cullen family? Not at all. As Anna Silver points out, this 'non-human, monstrous, adoptive family is, ironically, more of a family than Bella's biological human family'.⁴¹

4. Sexual Abstinence and the Erotic Longing to be Seen

In one of the longest running and most well-written contemporary vampire narratives, penned by Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, the main character is 2,000-year-old nobility. The Count Saint-Germaine, like the Cullens in *The Twilight Saga*, resists his predatory nature and must disguise his true identity in order to live in proximity to humans, a choice he willingly makes. Thus Saint-Germaine, like the Cullens, represents the vampire as perennial outsider, removed from the human world though never indifferent to it. Saint-Germaine's one-time lover and now friend Olivia understands the deep pain this entails:

I can still see your face, so full of loneliness and anguish. Are you, I wonder, as much alone now as you were then? Don't torment yourself.... As you taught me yourself, there is delight in this world, and until you die the true death, life will call you, and you must answer.⁴²

Saint-Germaine acknowledges his longing to know and be known. 'I think I would be willing to give half my years for someone who would know me for what I am—for all I am,' he admits, 'and would accept it all without reservation. In almost two thousand years I haven't found that'.⁴³ The longing to be known, loved, and accepted embeds Yarbro's Saint-Germaine novels in the Romance genre, alongside Meyer's *Twilight Saga*. This longing, and the way in which the relationship between Edward and Bella and Bella and Jacob satisfies this, is a large part of the Saga's appeal. Yes, from one perspective the novels deserve Christine Seifert's catchy label 'abstinence porn'.⁴⁴ But we may ask, when the characters abstain from sex, what other longing is satisfied?

The answer, I believe, is a longing to be seen, for 'someone to know me for what I am—for all I am,' to borrow Saint-Germaine's words. This longing is beautifully rendered in *The Twilight Saga* precisely because Meyer does not allow Edward and Bella to consummate the sexual dimension of their erotic hunger. Rather, the couple enjoys long, leisurely hours together, neither seeking nor allowing anything to disturb them—unless, of course, the plot thickens through the arrival of a lethal enemy such as the predatory James who views Bella as a snack, his vengeful mate Victoria and the new-borns she has made, or any one of the powerful Volturi who are a little too interested in the Cullen clan. Whenever they can, Edward and Bella share a lover's mutual gaze in a lover's private world. Each moment is one of noticing and discovering the beloved. These interludes firmly entrench the saga in the romance genre. They are erotic in the largest sense of this word: Bella and Edward invest a great deal of their libido, or life energy, in exploring and appreciating each other. The couple is physically, emotionally, mentally, and socially attuned to each other in a way that most of us rarely experience.

While this intensity of attunement has been called creepy and obsessive, it may be worthwhile to compare it to the kind of attachment bonds that form between mother (or caregiver) and child in the first years of life. Two decades of ground-breaking neurobiological research has now confirmed that secure attachment is critical in developing the infant's sense of a healthy self.⁴⁵ Caregivers who succeed in attuning themselves to overt and subtle expressions in the other offer a rich and nurturing developmental environment which has profound repercussions throughout the person's life. I am not suggesting that Bella is the infant under Edward's parenting gaze, though *The Twilight Saga* has been read that way. Rather, I am suggesting that the intimate gaze shares many similarities to psychobiological attunement, and that it is archetypal. That is, as a pattern, such attunement—a profound empathy at every level of being, physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual—is one of the most meaningful experiences in life. So long as this quality of attention is balanced with respect for the boundaries of the other, it fosters an environment in which human beings can flourish

regardless of age or stage of life. Someone who attunes to us, respectfully, offers an invaluable gift. They are crucial witnesses to the latent potentials, the bare sketch of our fuller selves, of which we are only dimly aware. I will return to this idea when I discuss the final novel, *Breaking Dawn*.

The romantic interludes between Bella and Edward also may account for a large part of the novels' appeal because it is precisely this slow, leisurely time with a loved one that the rapid pace of contemporary culture rarely offers. Dagmar Herzog, commenting on the messages of abstinence culture, explains: 'There are plenty of reasons why young people find these messages appealing. ... They may wish for romance but are finding only offers of intercourse.'⁴⁶ Romance, in this sentence, is defined as the slow, lingering time two people in love spend appreciating each other. For instance, in one of the more moving responses to a reader response study conducted by Mukherjee, she discovered one gay reader who envied the quiet, romantic times Bella and Edward enjoy. He and his boyfriend had just spent a difficult night out—having to withstand homophobic attacks at a restaurant and, after dinner, the mania of a gay dance club neither was in the mood for. The couple decided to return home, and this reminded him of *Twilight*. 'I was thinking about how Edward and Bella lie around in her bed, just talking how they want, like in that scene in the movie, and they just feel safe and trust each other.'⁴⁷ As this response suggests, the longing for quiet time with the beloved has nothing to do with sexual orientation. It also has nothing to do with age. Some older fans speak wistfully about the erotic space in the narrative, one that they remember but no longer experience. In an article published in *USA Today* describing adult fans of The Twilight Saga, two women interviewed touched on this theme. Valerie Gibson, a relationship expert says 'multi-generational mania for *Twilight* may be a testament to the emptiness of contemporary relationships. There's a loss of romance, of mystery, of the holding back of desire.' Lori Joffs, the creator of TwilightLexicon.com, says it helps adults recall 'those first twitches of falling in love' and allows them 'to relive it through Bella.'⁴⁸

At a time when new research is suggesting that our addiction to electronic media is intensifying the frantic pace and fragmentation of our lives, we might do well to consider how sexual abstinence in the novels operates as a marker for one of our deepest longings: the intimacy and grace of *social* intercourse. 'We are living in an isolation that would have been unimaginable to our ancestors,' says journalist Stephen Marche in a 2012 *Atlantic* essay,

and yet we have never been more accessible. Over the past three decades, technology has delivered to us a world in which we need not be out of contact for a fraction of a moment. ... the more connected we become, the lonelier we are.⁴⁹

Research by MIT psychologist Sherry Turkle, who has studied the effect of technology on culture for more than 20 years, supports this idea. In the conclusion to her 2011 book *Alone Together*, she says 'we enjoy continual connection but rarely have each other's full attention'⁵⁰—precisely the kind of full attention Edward and Bella offer each other, and that Bella receives from other members of her adopted family. Turkle admits her research 'has left me thinking about intimacy—about being with people in person, hearing their voices and seeing their faces. Trying to know their hearts. And it has left me thinking about solitude—the kind that refreshes and restores.'⁵¹ Thoughtful people from many disciplines are wondering about the incursion of the digital life in our most intimate relationships. In light of this, it is interesting to note that Meyer's novels rely on a surprisingly scant amount of technology, especially considering that they were published in the first decade of the 21st century. At no point do Edward and Bella allow phones (mobile or otherwise), computers, televisions, or digital

technology in any form to interfere with their intimacy, though are used at key plot points to support the action. The Twilight Saga offers a fantasy of returning to a quiet, simple time, before the advent of social media met our need for intimacy, or pretended to.⁵²

At another level, the social intimacy depicted in The Twilight Saga is subtly heteronormative in a way that I find disturbing. As Snitnow pointed out decades ago, 'when women try to imagine companionship, the society offers them one vision, male, sexual companionship'.⁵³ Despite its much-discussed abstinence, the Saga fits this description almost perfectly. Though Bella and Edward and, for that matter, Bella and Jacob, do little more than kiss in the first three novels of the series, Meyer makes it extremely clear that true seeing, the perceptive and feeling gaze of love, occurs primarily between a male and a female. Edward and Jacob are keenly attuned to Bella and she returns their attention. But when Bella chooses her girlfriends, she is quick to prefer the chatty and narcissistic Jessica over the compassionate Angela, primarily because Angela is 'too perceptive.' Bella makes it clear she is not invasive; she simply sees too much.⁵⁴ The exception is Edward's sister Alice, whose powers of perception are supernatural even for a vampire: she sees the future. Bella has no choice but to accept Alice's seeing. It is not within her control to do otherwise. But the attention Bella genuinely welcomes is from two males, Edward and Jacob, which supports some of the feminist criticism of the novels.

5. Seeing as Mentoring

In the final book of The Twilight Series, *Breaking Dawn*, we see the transformation of Bella from maiden to wife to mother to immortal. The story exemplifies the fairy tale genre with its conventional values and happily-ever-after endings featuring marriage, motherhood and domestic contentment. It is as though the Cullen family seek to mitigate their otherness through exaggerated conformity, inhabiting a blissful heteronormative world found nowhere in ordinary reality. They are a far cry from the mesmerizing pansexual vampires created by authors such as Anne Rice or Whitley Streiber. In a word, they have been domesticated, a trend noted by such vampire scholars as Gordon and Hollinger, one which may account for James Twitchell's hostility, quoted in the opening paragraph.

As mentioned earlier, feminist scholars have soundly criticized the Saga because Bella chooses marriage and motherhood over education and a career, among other reasons. Yet Meyer subverts the 19th century novels she assiduously reads, admires, and even invokes in The Twilight Saga by continuing Bella's story beyond the wedding day. Marriage and motherhood end Bella's human life, but they become the context in which she develops her unique power. For Bella, aspects of the process are conveniently magical, but others are not. In particular, the development of Bella's weird quirk into a formidable weapon is no easy task, nor is it a solitary one. Here, the theme of seeing comes to the forefront once again, when it is apparent that the Cullen tribe includes some remarkably attentive members. In fact, their attentiveness has a predatory stillness and focus which, as supernatural creatures, is fitting. Because the Cullens have made a moral choice not to prey on humans, they place this spooky ability in the service of something generative. They help Bella individuate. I discussed this theme earlier, offering examples from the first three novels. Now let us turn to the last novel of the Saga, *Breaking Dawn*, where this theme is most prominent and leads to the most profound change in Bella and in her extended family of ordinary humans and supernatural beings.

When Bella becomes Edward's immortal beloved, one of the undead, she moves so gracefully into her new world that Aro, one of the Volturi, says, 'In truth, young Bella, immortality does become you most extraordinarily ... It is as if you were designed for this life.'⁵⁵ Aro is more correct than even he realizes because it is as a vampire that Bella's human quirk is finally recognized for what it is, named, and developed. Shortly after the birth of

Bella's daughter Renesmee, a half-vampire child, followed immediately by Bella's transformation into a vampire, the Cullens are threatened by an ominous visit from the Volturi. Their elegant manner barely disguises the lethal agenda: they have come to destroy Renesmee, whom they believe is full vampire, then use this as an excuse to destroy the family as well. The Cullens, who know that their lives are on the line, gather vampire allies from around the world to serve as witness to who and what Renesmee truly is. But even this group of witnesses will not be adequate protection unless the Cullens can defend themselves long enough to speak. They must stay together and they must make the Volturi hesitate. It is at this moment that Bella develops an authentic identity, one that blends her unique skill with her own values.

It becomes clear that Bella's human quirk—her ability to shield her thoughts from Edward—is an embryonic form of a substantial power. She does not recognize her latent talent, as many of us fail to see ourselves clearly. We need parents, friends, lovers, and mentors to help us become visible to ourselves. At this point in the story, Edward shows himself to be far more than Bella's protector in a conventional bourgeois sense; he longs for her to feel confident in herself. Their rapidly growing child, who has quickly demonstrated her own unique talents, also plays a role. In fact, I have come to think of Bella's daughter Renesmee as a divine child, symbolizing what Carl Jung called the ineluctable pull of the future. To follow it, to individuate, Bella must discover the ferocious protectiveness of animal mothers. Literally, Bella must change or die, the biological imperative in its most basic form, and the metaphorical basis for the psychological transformation all of us must undergo to thrive.

The crucial moment, however, is a seemingly casual observation by one of their allies, Eleazar, who has a gift for seeing others more deeply than they do themselves. While pondering the potential of Edward, Bella, and their baby, he murmurs to himself that this is 'a very talented family ... A mind reader for a father, a shield for a mother, and then whatever magic this extraordinary child has bewitched us with.'⁵⁶ Not only does Edward pay attention, he urges Bella to envision herself in this new and more potent way.

Some critics have remarked that Bella's new-found power is traditionally feminine and, by inference, less impressive or meaningful. For instance, Shachar says:

What type of power is she actually given? The answer to this question is quite revealing for it is essentially the power to 'extend' herself as a shield to protect her family. ... summariz[ing] an argument that many feminist critics have made: that women's bodies and minds are not their own within a patriarchal society, but rather are the ideological property of those who require their service, making it difficult to conceptualize of a truly individual female identity.⁵⁷

I find this argument specious for several reasons. First, Bella's gift and her body are her own. Just as she insisted on becoming vampire, she works herself to the point of exhaustion to develop her shielding ability. Second, Bella clearly sees her shielding ability as an offensive weapon, describing it as a javelin that she can hurl from her body and shape to her will. She compares her skill to the paltry ability of Aro's personal shield Renata, who 'seemed so panicky and weak.'

I could tell she was no warrior. It was not her job to fight but to protect. There was no bloodlust in her. Raw as I was, I knew that if this were a fight between her and me, I would obliterate her.⁵⁸

Third, Bella can only become a truly potent shield by learning to see, taste, and direct a most unfeminine emotion in traditional patriarchal texts: rage. For instance, in a training session with Kate, one of the Cullen's allies and a formidable warrior in her own right, Bella admits:

I was so furious that my vision took on a strange reddish tint, and my tongue tasted like burning metal. The strength I usually worked to keep restrained flowed through my muscles, and I knew I could crush her [Kate] into diamond-hard rubble if she pushed me to it. The rage brought every aspect of my being into sharper focus.⁵⁹

Last, and possibly most important, Bella keeps secret the full extent of her newfound skill. Not one of the Cullens or their allies realizes the size, strength, and precision of the energetic shield Bella can extrude from herself. In the final test, when Bella's entire way of life is at stake, she privately exults in her new power.

My fury peaked ... I could taste madness on my tongue—I felt it flow through me like a tidal wave of pure power... I threw the shield with all the force in my mind, flung it across the impossible expanse of the field—ten times my best distance—like a javelin... I could feel it flex like just another muscle, obedient to my will. I pushed it, shaped it to a long, pointed oval. Everything underneath the flexible iron shield was suddenly part of me—I could feel the life force of everything it covered like points of bright heat, dazzling sparks of light surrounding me ... Barely a second had passed... Everything had changed absolutely, but no one had noticed the explosion except for me.⁶⁰

The family acknowledges Bella's key role later, after the confrontation with the Volturi, and celebrate her. Thus Bella ultimately comes into her own though the struggle with her beloved and on behalf of what she loves, which includes a wildly diverse family made up of vampires, shape-shifters, half-breeds, and a couple of humans. True, the sphere Bella chooses is traditional, but it still affords her the opportunity to individuate, becoming powerful, effective, and self-confident. In the end, Bella is both unique and exceptional, even among the many exceptional beings who surround and love her.

No doubt *The Twilight Saga* will continue to attract criticism for its conservative values as well as its simple writing. But it would be mistaken to dismiss Bella through recourse to a superficial, reductive, or monotonous interpretation. Such an approach teaches nothing of value and this complex character, like the tween and teen (and adult) readers she fascinates, deserves better.

Notes

¹ James Twitchell, *The Living Dead: A Study of the Vampire in Romantic Literature* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1981), ix.

² Nina Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (University of Chicago Press, 1995), 1.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Joan Gordon and Victoria Hollinger, eds., *Blood Read* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 4.

⁵ Charnas quoted in Gordon and Hollinger, *Blood Read*, 61.

⁶ Twitchell, *The Living Dead*, ix.

⁷ For an interesting article on the commodification of The Twilight Saga, read Tanya Erzen 'The Vampire Capital of the World: Commerce and Enchantment in Forks, Washington', in *Theorizing Twilight: Critical Essays on what's at Stake in a Post-Vampire World*, eds. Maggie Parke and Natalie Wilson (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2011), 11-24.

⁸ Jessica Groper, 'Rewriting the Byronic Hero: How The *Twilight* Saga Turned 'Mad, Bad, and Dangerous to Know' into a Teen Fiction Phenomenon, in Parke and Wilson, eds., *Theorizing Twilight*, 147-148.

⁹ Fleur Diamond points out that the 'widespread commercial success for a female-coded text featuring a female protagonist is unusual.' See 'Beauty and the Beautiful Beast: Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* and the Quest for a Transgressive Female Desire' *Australian Feminist Studies* 26.67 (2011): 41-51.

¹⁰ Nancy Wilson, *Seduced by Twilight: The Allure and Contradictory Messages of the Popular Saga* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2011), 44.

¹¹ Charles Sarland, 'Critical Tradition and Ideological Positioning,' in *Understanding Children's Literature*, ed. Peter Hunt (London: Routledge, 2005), 30-49.

¹² Wilson, *Seduced by Twilight*, 59.

¹³ Scholarly and mainstream authors have noted that The Twilight Saga appeals to millions of adults as well as adolescents around the globe, answering different kinds of hungers.

¹⁴ C. G. Jung, *The Development of Personality*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1954), 171.

¹⁵ James Hillman, *The Soul's Code* (New York: Random House, 1996), 6.

¹⁶ Clive Leatherdale, *Dracula, the Novel and the Legend* (Wellingborough, England: The Aquarian Press, 1985), 15.

¹⁷ Erzen in Parke and Wilson, *Theorizing Twilight*, 14.

¹⁸ Diamond, 'Beauty and the Beautiful Beast', 41.

¹⁹ Leonard Wolf, ed., *Blood Thirst* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 7.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

²¹ Heather Anastasiu adopts psychoanalytic language to describe this as a tension between id and superego, pointing out that both Edward and Bella exemplify Freudian psychodynamics. See 'The Hero and the Id: A Psychoanalytic Inquiry into the Popularity of *Twilight*', in Parke and Wilson, eds., *Theorizing Twilight*, 41-55.

²² This theme becomes apparent in the second book of the saga, *New Moon*, which opens with Bella's 18th birthday party and the dramatic consequences of a mundane event—a tiny paper cut Bella receives while unwrapping a present—which instantly arouses Jasper's blood lust. To Bella, it is nothing, but Edward interprets the event very differently. Within days, he breaks up with her and the entire Cullen family leaves Forks. The result is the creation of another kind of monster within the story. Figuratively, Bella becomes a zombie. Readers see this most starkly in the four blank months following the Cullen's departure, a move that places readers firmly within Bella's blank world view and the bleakness of her despair. Bella only begins to return to life when she discovers that courting danger brings Edward in her imagination. But this move exposes her to another kind of danger, proximity to Jacob Black, a young and lethal werewolf who also is her best friend. Like their vampire counterparts, newborn werewolves are the most dangerous because they are least able to control their impulses. We see the visible evidence of this danger in the scarred body of Emily Young, Sam's mate: one lapse in Sam's control leads to her lifelong disfigurement.

²³ Hannah Shachar, 'A Post-Feminist Romance: Love, Gender and Intertextuality in Stephenie Meyer's *Saga*', in Parke and Wilson, eds., *Theorizing Twilight*, 147-161.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 148.

²⁵ Elizabeth Hand, 'Love Bites', *The Washington Post*, 10 August 2008, 7.

²⁶ Diamond, 'Beauty and the Beautiful Beast', 51.

²⁷ What Bella does with that freedom—choosing marriage and motherhood at a very young age over education and career—is a key aspect of the conservative values encoded in the texts, and something that feminist scholars in particular have justly criticized. However, as Silver points out, the expressed values are not merely retrograde. On the one hand, 'unlike many *bildungsromanen* that validate individual accomplishment and autonomy, Meyer's novel all but ignores individualism in favor of affiliation'. On the other, the novel 'proposes that marriage and motherhood provide women with equality that they do not possess as single women. Motherhood becomes a location not only of pleasure and satisfaction but also of power. See Anna Silver 'Twilight is not Good for Maidens: Gender, Sexuality and the Family in Stephenie Meyer's Twilight Series', *Studies in the Novel* 42 (Spring & Summer 2010): 123-124.

²⁸ Richard Frankel, *The Adolescent Psyche: Jungian and Winnicottian Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 66.

²⁹ Psychologists view such 'numbing' in a few different ways, including repression and dissociation. The hallmark of both diagnoses is flat affect, when one's emotional range is greatly compressed. A textbook example of this from The Twilight Saga is Bella's response to Edward's departure at the beginning of the second novel, *New Moon*, which I discussed above, in note 22.

³⁰ Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 190.

³¹ Barbara Fuchs, *Romance* (London: Routledge, 2004), 4.

³² Bonnie Mann, 'Vampire Love: The Second Sex Negotiates the Twenty-First Century' in *Twilight and Philosophy: Vampires, Vegetarians, and the Pursuit of Immortality*, eds. Rebecca Housel, J. Jerry Wisniewski (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2009), 131-145.

³³ Anna Mukherjea, 'Team Bella: Fans Navigating Desire, Security, and Feminism' in Parke and Wilson, *Theorizing Twilight*, 70-83, original italics.

³⁴ Ashley Donnelly, 'Denial and Salvation: The *Twilight* Saga and Heteronormative Patriarchy,' in Parke and Wilson, eds., *Theorizing Twilight*, 178-193.

³⁵ Diamond, 'Beauty and the Beautiful Beast', 47.

³⁶ Anastasiu in Parke and Wilson, eds., *Theorizing Twilight*, 48.

³⁷ For a fascinating and disturbing study of this theme, see Mary Pipher's 2005 book *Reviving Ophelia*.

³⁸ Stephenie Meyer, *Twilight* (New York: Little, Brown, 2005), 44-47.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 385-389.

⁴⁰ Stephenie Meyer, *New Moon* (New York: Little, Brown, 2006), 425-427.

⁴¹ Silver, 'Twilight is Not Good for Maidens', 127.

⁴² This is an excerpt from a letter included in Yarbrow's 1978 novel *The Palace* (New York: St. Martin's Press), 67.

⁴³ The theme of Saint-Germaine's loneliness persists throughout Yarbrow's vampire series. This excerpt is from the 1979 novel *Blood Games* (New York: St. Martins Press), 74.

⁴⁴ Christine Seifert, 'Bite Me! (Or Don't)', *Bitch: Feminist Response to Pop Culture* 42 (2009): 23-25.

⁴⁵ For further information, see Allan Schore, *The Science of the Art of Psychotherapy* (New York: Norton, 2012). This volume, just published, summarizes two decades of research in affect regulation and human development as well as offering the most up-to-date findings in the field.

⁴⁶ Dagmar Herzog, *Sex in Crisis: The New Sexual Revolution and the Future of American Politics* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 99.

⁴⁷ Mukherjea in Parke and Wilson, eds., *Theorizing Twilight*, 79.

⁴⁸ Maria Puente, 'Women Mooning over Teen *Twilight*', *USA Today*, Viewed November 23, 2009. <http://pgi.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=J0E268208337309&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

⁴⁹ Stephen Marche, 'Is Facebook Making us Lonely?' *The Atlantic*, May 2012, 60-62.

⁵⁰ Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why we Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 280.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 288.

⁵² Wilson discusses this point in the introduction to her book (*Seduced by Twilight*, 9). 'Emerging at a cultural moment colored by ... the explosion of internet culture, *Twilight* is both a product of and reaction to these trends. ... We are profoundly distanced from face-to-face contact... the series speaks to our innate desire for connection.'

⁵³ Ann Snitnow, 'Mass Market Romance: Pornography for Women is Different', in *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. Mary Eagleton (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 138.

⁵⁴ Meyer, *New Moon*, 157.

⁵⁵ Stephenie Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* (New York: Little, Brown, 2008), 696.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 595.

⁵⁷ Shachar in Parke and Wilson, eds., *Theorizing Twilight*, 153-54.

⁵⁸ Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 693.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 620.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 690-691.

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Vampires Love Differently to Humans: What does Bella Teach Us about (Un)Orthodox Love in The Twilight Saga?

Kathy McKay and Myfanwy Maple

Abstract

The Twilight Saga has become an international phenomenon, inspiring a loyal army of predominantly female fans, from tweens to their mothers. However, it remains uncertain how these readers interact with, or absorb, the lessons offered within the story. The narrative of Bella and Edward's love story has been previously dissected within a feminist frame looking at the way in which Bella conforms to a patriarchal feminine role. However, the ways in which varying ideals and purposes of love act to create Bella's character and role have not yet been fully explored. This article explores three broad themes regarding the lessons Bella teaches about love within The Twilight Saga. These three themes are: 1) Love is passive; 2) Love is everything; and, 3) Love is enhanced by anger, pain and violence. These lessons are dissected alongside other pop-cultural and literary sources that have inspired the *Twilight* narrative, including *Romeo and Juliet* and *Wuthering Heights*. In this way, Bella's lessons are able to be deconstructed in terms of a reader's absorption or interaction with the text. Are Bella's lessons about love realistic for young women today or do they speak to a different time and place?

Key Words: *Twilight*, love, vampires, violence, gendered stereotypes.

We must believe in [love], or we're lost. We may not obtain it, or we may obtain it and find it renders us unhappy; we must still believe in it. If we don't, then we merely surrender to the history of the world and to someone else's truth.¹

1. Who is Bella Swan?

The Twilight Saga is a four-book, 2244-page international phenomenon targeted to a (predominantly female) young adult audience. Its characters are an array of vampires, werewolves, and humans and, while set in modern-day America, its values predominantly speak to a time long past. Yet for all this, the question above remains uncertainly answered: who is Bella Swan? *Twilight* tells of the love story between Edward, a vampire fashioned as a Byronic hero with an Austen-ian namesake,² and Bella, a misfit 17-year-old girl. Throughout the series, their love affair shapes Bella's character and role; she becomes wife and mother, daughter and sister. She is rarely of herself but constantly framed as one-half of a unit, part of a family borne out of blood, if not blood-related. While other female heroines within modern vampire lore have taken on roles of motherhood, and experienced less-than-ideal familial structures,³ Bella is one of the few who have done so as an entire change of identity. Until the conclusion of the final book,⁴ where she is both vampire and saviour, Bella straddles the norms, expectations and dangers of two worlds—the human world and the vampire world⁵—without fitting in either.

However, while Bella is uncertainly placed as human/vampire, she appears to conform strongly to the feminine ideals of an earlier time. Indeed, Stephenie Meyer, the Mormon author of the series, has been criticised for her conservative politicisation of womanhood within the

narrative. The Twilight Saga arguably valorises wifehood and motherhood above and beyond education and independence, while also idealizing the inequality and dependence demonstrated within Edward and Bella's relationship.⁶ Bella is certainly not a 21st-century feminist icon, nor a 19th-century one in the vein of Austen's Elizabeth Bennett in *Pride and Prejudice*.⁷ Even when compared to recent vampire lore, she is neither independent from, nor physically equal to, most of the other male characters—Buffy, the title character from Joss Whedon's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, was able to kill the vampire she loved when the safety of the world depended on it.⁸ However, as its main narrator, Bella's perceptions and experiences of love are the prime examples carried to the reader—what she extols can either be absorbed or interacted with by the reader. However, it remains uncertain how much is absorbed, how much is interacted with, and by which readers.⁹ This is an issue deserving of attention considering that more than a hundred million copies of the books have been sold throughout the world, and have been translated into myriad languages. The article seeks to dissect what Bella teaches her readers about love throughout the narrative of The Twilight Saga. Throughout the story Bella and Edward share an unorthodox relationship, a love above and beyond all others: 'something more expressive of eternal commitment'.¹⁰ However, this argument is flawed given the work's deep debt to other literary couples such as *Romeo and Juliet* and Heathcliff and Cathy from *Wuthering Heights*; a fact debated by Edward later in *Eclipse*.¹¹ Further, it has also been demonstrated that The Twilight Saga follows tropes set long ago by the morality lessons of fairytales.¹² Fairytales are age-old stories that often follow similar narratives of good versus evil, seeing beyond appearances, and triumph over adversity.¹³ However, they occupy an interesting space: superficially, fairytales are stories told to children for pleasure, yet their undercurrents tend to be firmly rooted within patriarchal ideals of femininity and masculinity; they were the original morality tales meant to teach acceptable values and wisdom. Short argues:

If fairytales are intended to prepare children for adulthood then the number of adolescent females featuring in such tales is as notable as the dangers they face and the means of salvation they are given. Far from securing an "independent existence", maturity for female characters is generally signalled through marriage.¹⁴

Indeed, after overcoming adversity, hardworking and modest girls were rewarded, especially if they were beautiful, with the love of, and marriage to, a handsome prince.¹⁵ Further, as fairytales have been retold, the valorisation of hardworking girls has been strengthened, and the traditional murkiness of some 'heroes' has vanished.¹⁶ This article seeks to further extend this fairytale analysis of The Twilight Saga within a feminist critical analysis framework where the monsters are not always so monstrous but goodness is still rewarded with marriage.

While Bella is located in both the human and vampire worlds, so too is The Twilight Saga located in both the romantic genre and the supernatural/horror genre. Such underpinnings, along with the in-text references to *Romeo and Juliet* and *Wuthering Heights*, heavily influence Bella's teachings about love. Using the analysis described above, her teachings cover three broad themes:

1. Love is passive;
2. Love is everything; and,
3. Love is enhanced by anger, pain, and violence.

These will be explored in the following sections.

2. Love is Passive

Bella's teaching that love is passive is one of the most pervasive learnings throughout the series. Indeed, her own passivity is one of the most criticised and critical aspects of Bella's character and role transformation; this is exacerbated when compared with other traditional fairytale heroines such as Red Cap or Gretel who were far more proactive in their rites of passage.¹⁷ The way Bella demonstrates the passivity connected to love can be deconstructed in two ways.

First, the predominant romantic relationships within The Twilight Saga are shown to be products of fate.¹⁸ In the same vein as Romeo and Juliet and Heathcliff and Cathy, they meet and are forever afterwards inextricably tied together.¹⁹ Bella and Edward meet in the first chapter of the first book. While he initially appears repulsed by her, 'sitting on the extreme edge of his chair and averting his face like he smelled something bad,'²⁰ he saves her life twice before confessing both his love and undead state to her by the first book's final battle. Bella's smell is intoxicating to Edward and, just after one day, Edward occupies Bella's thoughts.²¹ Meyer creates a narrative frame by which neither can live without each other simply by having met; they are depicted as akin to addicts, although Edward is able to more effectively restrain his cravings.²² Yet, even when circumstance drives them apart, Bella and Edward are seemingly almost driven mad by the loss of each other's company.²³ This appears to speak very strongly to the suffering endured by Heathcliff and Cathy.

Indeed, all of Meyer's vampire relationships have aspects of passivity within them. Within Edward's vampire family,²⁴ Carlisle sires Esme when she is brought into the hospital following a suicide attempt and Rosalie carries an almost-dead Emmett to be saved again by Carlisle.²⁵ While Carlisle and Rosalie make active choices in this process, Esme and Emmett are passive participants in their ultimate resurrection. Indeed, the bonds between vampire lovers are drawn by Meyer to be closer than any human relationship, the loss of one spurring the other onto (mis)deeds fuelled by grief: Victoria seeks furious revenge after Edward kills James to protect Bella²⁶ and Irina betrays the Cullen family to the Volturi in the midst of her grief at losing Laurent.²⁷ Further, the Cullen family are again marked as extraordinary in their closeness: 'These strange golden-eyed ones deny their very nature. But in return they have found something worth even more, perhaps, than mere gratification of desire.'²⁸ Alice and Jasper are different in that both were sired by completely external parties, although the depth of their bond to each other and their family cannot be denied.

However, while seemingly small, there remains some aspect of agency within these relationships; Esme and Emmett could have left the Cullen family to seek a more blood-thirsty coven, and Alice and Jasper chose each other. While this may be the expressed lore of the vampire family members, among the werewolves, there is no agency at all. Initially assumed to be a rare occurrence, several of the werewolves, including Jacob, imprint onto their beloved. They are passive in this experience in that the imprinting simply occurs:

When you see *her*, suddenly it's not the earth holding you here anymore. She does. And nothing matters more than her. And you would do anything for her, be anything for her...You become whatever she needs you to be, whether that's a protector, or a lover, or a friend, or a brother.²⁹

The relationships sprung from this imprinting are presumed to be romantic, at least eventually, because the ties binding the werewolf to the other create 'a perfect match'. However, the passivity and inevitability demonstrated within these imprinted relationships travels some rocky ground in two examples: Quil imprints onto a two-year-old girl and Jacob imprints onto Renesmee from the moment she is born. Here, Meyer's strong adherence to

abstinence becomes vital to the story so as to make neither Quil nor Jacob a paedophile; they are both able to be 'good' heroes until their beloved is old enough to be their 'princess'. Imprinted relationships do not appear to require sexual involvement in order to achieve a very deep intimacy—the werewolf simply constructs himself to be all the woman wants and needs. It becomes the ultimate complementary relationship. In telling Quil's story, Jacob argues:

There's nothing *romantic* about it at all, at least not for Quil, not now. ... Quil will be the best, kindest big brother any kid ever had. There isn't a toddler on the planet that will be more carefully looked after than that little girl will be. And then, when she's older and needs a friend, he'll be more understanding, trustworthy, and reliable than anyone else she knows. And then, when she's grown up, they'll be as happy as Emily and Sam.³⁰

Indeed, when Jacob briefly becomes the narrator in *Breaking Dawn*, his telling of an imprinting experience does not betray lust, romance, or even love. In a physical, tangible shifting of his being, Jacob becomes tied to the new-born Renesmee:

Not one string, but a million. Not strings, but steel cables. A million steel cables all tying me to one thing—to the very center of the universe. I could see that now—how the universe swirled around this one point. I'd never seen the symmetry of the universe before, but now it was plain. The gravity of the earth no longer tied me to the place where I stood. It was the baby girl in the blond vampire's arms that held me here now.³¹

Throughout the rest of the novel, Jacob's feelings for Renesmee are deeply grounded within the modes of chivalry—he is her brave protector, her needs are his only thought.³² Indeed, Meyer's device of allowing Renesmee to develop at a fantastic speed means that she becomes able to display an equally chaste reciprocation of Jacob's feelings.

Second, within these passive relationships, Bella and Edward are drawn as even more bound together. Some writers³³ have deconstructed and critiqued Bella's dependence and reliance upon Edward, a trait that appears from their very first meeting. Edward is constantly saving Bella from events that are both entirely accidental (the skidding truck in *Twilight*³⁴) and of her own making (walking into the dark alley towards the would-be rapists in *Twilight*.³⁵ Indeed, until the final battle in *Breaking Dawn*, Edward saves Bella at each book's life-threatening conclusion; from James (*Twilight*), the Volturi (*Eclipse*), and Victoria (*New Moon*). It must also be mentioned that Jacob saves Bella's life after she throws herself off a cliff into the ocean in an apparent suicide attempt.³⁶ Indeed, Meyer makes constant reference to Bella's human-ness as traits of lack of coordination and delicacy (a paper cut opening a birthday present leads to stitches after she then falls into a glass coffee table³⁷), in direct comparison to Edward's strength and beauty ('Time had not made me immune to the perfection of his face, and I was sure that I would never take any aspect of him for granted'³⁸). It almost seems as though Meyer is creating such a dependent relationship because Edward and Bella are so different; his vampire nature is illustrated to make him an ideal, if not always infallible, protector. Indeed, Meyer's narrative is different to more traditional stories of love and marriage between humans and non-humans where human-ness is sought in order for the relationship to survive;³⁹ instead, Bella seeks to be made into a vampire.

Further, it can be argued that Bella is so passive because she feels so unworthy and fragile as a human when compared to Edward's vampiric glory. Bella's lack of self-esteem is

evident throughout the novels, even continuing after her transformation into a vampire. Indeed, Taylor described Bella as a ‘moral masochist’:

This state has been described as one in which one person shows an unusual degree of dependence and submission, sometimes carried to the greatest extreme, toward another. In the relationship the dominant partner possesses some special characteristics which are held as part of the self-ideal, usually in the most primitive and grotesque form, of the submissive one. These characteristics are therefore sought by him [sic] and may be magically attained in a *unio mystica* with the dominant partner.⁴⁰

In Bella’s eyes, Edward is as good as he is beautiful—she places a soul in a monster’s being, even while constantly being reminded of his nature; indeed, Edward and Jacob are both cast as monsters who are not monstrous.⁴¹ Like a statue come to life, Edward is cold and hard, where she is as warm-blooded and soft as any human. Bella constantly distances herself from other people, constructs a ‘human society’ in which she does not belong:

I didn’t relate well to people my age. Maybe the truth was I didn’t relate well to people, period. Even my mother, who I was closer to than anyone else on the planet, was never in with me, never on exactly the same page. Sometimes I wondered if I was seeing the same things through my eyes that the rest of the world was seeing through theirs. Maybe there was a glitch in my brain.⁴²

Bella’s lack of self-esteem means that she constantly sees herself as inferior; she is always the problem.

However, Edward’s love saves her from this; his love propels Bella into wifehood and motherhood. By siring her, Edward not only resurrects Bella in a Christ-like fashion⁴³ but literally gives her a new life in which she shines, both literally and metaphorically forever:

After eighteen years of mediocrity, I was pretty used to being average. I realized now that I’d long ago given up any aspirations of shining at anything. I just did the best with what I had, never quite fitting into my world. So this was really different. I was amazing now—to them and to myself. It was like I had been born to be a vampire. The idea made me want to laugh but it also made me want to sing. I had found my true place in the world, the place I fit, the place I shined.⁴⁴

Similar to other fairytales,⁴⁵ Meyer’s story argues that these traditional feminine roles (albeit performed by an untraditional female) bring out the very best in a woman. He may be a vampire, but Edward’s true love has created the perfect canvas upon which a shining example of this idealised womanhood could be created.⁴⁶ Without Edward, Bella would have had a mediocre human life; with Edward’s love, Bella has family, home, wealth and immortality.

3. Love is Everything

Within these frames, Bella’s second lesson is that love is everything; it changes your whole life and being.⁴⁷ Love for Edward takes over Bella’s whole being and existence. As evidenced by the first two-thirds of *New Moon*, Bella can only be happy when she actively and tangibly loved by Edward, without this, she is utterly adrift, both passively and actively suicidal.⁴⁸ However, these feelings are reciprocated by Edward; he is just as emotionally tied to

Bella and, in a trope taken from Shakespeare, when he thinks Bella is dead goes to Volterra to have his own life ended.⁴⁹ After they are reunited, Edward tells Bella:

Before you, Bella, my life was like a moonless night. Very dark, but there were stars—points of light and reason... And then you shot across my sky like a meteor. Suddenly, everything was on fire; there was brilliancy, there was beauty. When you were gone, when the meteor had fallen over the horizon, everything went black. Nothing had changed, but my eyes were blinded by the light. I couldn't see the stars anymore. And there was no more reason for anything.⁵⁰

In this way, his love for Bella becomes akin to imprinting; his whole world has shifted centre and focus. And indeed, as with other fairytales,⁵¹ the love between Edward and Bella appears to overcome all obstacles, defeat even the most powerful enemies. Despite their differences, and inherent danger, Bella and Edward win over their families and communities to eventually marry and parent.⁵² Indeed, it can be argued Bella's siring makes her completely acceptable to the Cullen family—they no longer have to quell any desire around her. Their vampire state essentially prevents the Cullen family from making any meaningful attachments to humans and a continuing relationship with Bella's father is the only necessary human family attachment narrated. In this light, love is defined and dependent upon whether one is human, undead, or a werewolf.

Yet, Meyer deems that Bella and Edward's love will conquer all. *Breaking Dawn*'s final words ('And then we continued blissfully into this small but perfect piece of our forever'⁵³) presume a happily-ever-afterwards. An ugly duckling in *Twilight*, Bella is able to not only capture the prince's heart but become a beautiful swan by the end of *Breaking Dawn*.

This is a common fairytale narrative but can it be any more than this? Is Bella's lesson truly realistic for those readers absorbing her every word⁵⁴? Bella's story certainly conforms to the traditional ideal of a masculine saviour for feminine loneliness;⁵⁵ spinsterhood arguably remains less idealised than bachelordom. Yet is love alone enough in any relationship—is love enough to make a person happy? Bella's actions indicate that she believes only love is needed for her happiness; yet, she does not seek it from within herself as she constructs herself as too imperfect.⁵⁶ In this way, Barnes would argue that Bella is setting herself up for disappointment:

We think of [love] as an active force. My love *makes* her happy; her love *makes* me happy: how could this be wrong? It is wrong; it evokes a false conceptual model. It implies that love is a transforming wand, one that unlooses the ravelled knot, fills the top hat with handkerchiefs, sprays the air with doves. But the model isn't from magic but particle physics. My love does not, cannot *make* her happy; my love can only release in her the capacity to be happy. And now things seem more understandable. How come I can't make her happy, how come she can't make me happy? Simple: the atomic reaction you expect isn't taking place, the beam with which you are bombarding the particles is on the wrong wavelength.⁵⁷

Barnes is not arguing that love can never be enough, rather that the lovers need to interact with it. Love should inspire lovers to greater happiness, to find the ways in which they can exist as individuals as well as a couple.

Bella does not teach this same lesson. She not only needs love to make her happy but also a specific lover. Jacob's love is not enough, although it makes her feel warm and happy.⁵⁸

Bella needs Edward's physical presence and his expressions of love to make her happy and contented, fulfilled within herself.⁵⁹ In this way, Meyer again grounds Bella in tropes initially found in the classic stories of Juliet and Cathy. Regardless of their goodness, Paris and Edgar Linton could not make neither Juliet nor Cathy happy—they could only be very-distant seconds to their true loves. Indeed, after Linton proposes, Cathy declares about Heathcliff: 'Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same; and Linton's is as different as a moonbeam from lightning, or frost from fire.'⁶⁰ With these words, Cathy condemns the chance of any future happiness with Linton, just as Bella does with Jacob. However, while Cathy eventually gives up her life trying to find her way back to Heathcliff, Meyer allows Bella a happy ending. In this way, Bella's lesson remains truthful—Edward's love is able to make her happy.

However, Meyer's happy ending makes *The Twilight Saga* arguably less realistic than either *Romeo and Juliet* or *Wuthering Heights*. Bella's lesson is undoubtedly romantic but it is not feasible in real life.⁶¹ The stories of Romeo and Juliet, Heathcliff and Cathy, stay as romantic ideals because they died tragically as well. Their stories did not encompass growing old together, the mundane nature of everyday life; marriage, parenting, ageing. A great romantic poet, even Byron wrote: 'There is no such thing as a life of passion any more than a continuous earthquake, or an eternal fever.'⁶² Love changes with time, as with everything else; what does not change may not grow or deepen. It is not that 'mundane' love is not beautiful, rather that it has a different beauty to idealised romantic love. Indeed, given that they had 'forever' in front of them, surely Edward and Bella would one day crave a few days apart without their love dissolving before their eyes.

Further, Meyer arguably skims over the fact that a tunnel-visioned belief in the infallibility of love appears to make the lovers selfish. Just as Paris is discarded, and Linton is left alone with his unrequited love, so Bella abuses Jacob's love for her.⁶³ This is most explicitly demonstrated when, fearful of being left alone, Bella passionately kisses Jacob before he leaves for the battle against Victoria and her vampire army.⁶⁴ While there is never any serious competition between Edward and Jacob in the narrative, regardless of Bella's self-centred monologues, the ties between Bella and Jacob are constantly strengthened throughout the books, and it is clear from the beginning that Jacob wishes to win Bella's heart. Meyer finally, and peacefully, resolves this triangular conflict by allowing Jacob to imprint on Renesmee, allowing Bella to have both men play important roles in her life.

4. Love is Enhanced by Anger, Pain and Violence

The constant threats to Bella's life, the relationships with Edward and Jacob, and the moral masochism displayed by Bella⁶⁵ throughout *The Twilight Saga* all point to her third broad lesson about love. Bella teaches that love is enhanced by feelings of anger and pain, and within a violent environment. This is a learning born out of both romantic traditions but also vampire lore. The passion surrounding Romeo and Juliet's love was intensified by the violence of their families in Verona at the time; arguably their love would not have been denied, their lives not ended, had their families not been feuding. The love between Edward and Bella grows within an environment where Bella is in constant danger, from herself and others, thus requiring Edward to continually save her, and for her to be indebted for being saved.⁶⁶ In addition, the creation of a vampire is a violent and bloody process.⁶⁷ Yet it only serves to intensify Bella's love for Edward; he becomes both her father and her husband. Further, unlike the relationships Buffy experiences with the vampires Angel and Spike in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Bella does not have to contend with an evil past.⁶⁸ Like Angel and Spike, Edward may have tasted human blood but he is never painted as a villain in the same way.⁶⁹ Further, Edward may carry emotional baggage as to his identity, as do Angel and Spike, but Bella's romantic storyline

overrides the difficulties of whether love created amidst violence can survive peacetime; he was already civilised before entering into a relationship with her.⁷⁰

Indeed, while Bella's happy-ever-after presumes peacetime, throughout the novels Bella teaches that it is good to sacrifice oneself for love; more than this, it is good to die violently for the person you love.⁷¹ In her eyes, true love requires sacrifice. Bella places her life at risk to save Edward at the conclusions of the first three novels of *The Twilight Saga*, and then dies in a bloody mess giving birth to Renesmee. Buffy may have killed Angelus, and sacrificed her own life, in order to save the world from demonic rule, but this was done as a last resort. Life was valued within the narratives of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*;⁷² *The Twilight Saga* arguably values sacrifice more. Indeed, Romeo and Juliet, and Heathcliff and Cathy, sacrifice their lives for their love but these stories are tragedies, their love and deaths bringing unhappiness to many others. Their sacrifice is not valorised in the same way that Bella's risks are idealised in *The Twilight Saga*.⁷³ The difference here is that Bella is always saved; she is even resurrected from the dead. This is arguably a dangerous lesson that Bella implies to her readers.⁷⁴ In the real world, no matter how much a man may love them—for Meyer preaches heteronormativity—he may not always be able to protect his beloved from all the negative consequences of her actions. While Edward's love places Bella in a metaphorical bubble where no harm ever truly comes to her, readers cannot presume that love will bring them the same protection. In the real world, rapes and murders still happen, women still die in childbirth, and death is the end.

Yet, even with Bella's perfect love, Meyer suggests in *Breaking Dawn*'s final conflict that anger may be a greater power than love. As a vampire, Bella discovers she is able to create a shield that tangibly protects those under it from any harm. While she is happy, Bella struggles to throw the shield over any sizable distance for a long period of time. However, when faced with the dangerous Jane and the Volturi army, Bella finds that her anger towards them allows her to strengthen her shield:

[Jane's] smug little smile did it. My fury peaked, higher even than the raging bloodlust I'd felt the moment the wolves had committed to this doomed fight. I could taste madness on my tongue—I felt it flow through me like a tidal wave of pure power. My muscles tightened, and I acted automatically. I threw my shield with all the force of my mind, flung it across the impossible expanse of the field—ten times my best distance—like a javelin. My breath rushed out in a huff with the exertion.⁷⁵

In this instance, her love for Edward and the rest of her family was not enough by itself to allow her mind the freedom to expand. Love may have made Bella a vampiric wife and mother but it also made her vulnerable—her enemies know her love for Edward is also her weakness. She will always choose to sacrifice herself. Indeed, Meyer indicates this at the beginning of the final book of *Breaking Dawn* with a quote from another Mormon writer, Orson Scott Card:

Personal affection is a luxury you can have only after all your enemies are eliminated. Until then, everyone you love is a hostage, sapping your courage and corrupting your judgment.⁷⁶

Yet, in this battle, Bella teaches her readers that anger strengthens her love; without it, she would not have been able to save her husband, child, and family. Bella literally becomes empowered by her anger and love combined. Vulnerability becomes conceptualised as a

weakness but it is this vulnerability that allows for love in the first place, as trust cannot be built without this requisite openness and honesty. As Barnes writes:

Love makes us see the truth, makes it our duty to tell the truth. ... How you cuddle in the dark governs how you see the history of the world. It's as simple as that.⁷⁷

It can be argued that the fury, bloodlust and madness described by Bella would make a frightening bedfellow. Bella's history of the world here speaks of violence and fear. Indeed, it again also follows the tragedy of *Wuthering Heights* where hatred and jealousy are felt just as often by Cathy and Heathcliff as love and lead to their eventual deaths.⁷⁸

Indeed, one cannot read The Twilight Saga and not learn from Bella that love causes tremendous pain and suffering. This is clearly demonstrated in *New Moon* where the reader flips through the pages of October-November-December-January, missing important North American holidays, as Bella becomes 'lifeless' after Edward leaves her.⁷⁹ While they happily reunite at the book's conclusion, Bella suffers self-doubt, confusion and emotional pain about her relationship with Edward throughout the rest of the story until she is sired. It is only when she becomes a vampire, and then not until her shield proves to be effective, that she feels worthy of Edward's love. She feels empowered to be his wife. Indeed, at times Bella's dependence on Edward and her lack of self outside the relationship have made her a difficult person with which to sympathise.⁸⁰ Yet, it is Bella's female school peers who are painted as less forgiving and more judgemental than any of the male characters who forgive her more easily. In this way, Bella becomes a male-oriented female character. Despite her close relationship with Alice, particularly, Bella is never without a man beside her to rely on. Indeed, Alice is portrayed as most useful when she is helping Bella choose clothes and talking about Edward,⁸¹ Bella valorises the men she knows as good, strong and infallible; women may be beautiful, especially vampires, but they are not as god-like.

Yet, even when Edward and Bella are reunited, when they are happy, their relationship continues to be grounded within a sense of seriousness.⁸² Outside of Edward's occasional amusement found in Bella's lack of coordination, there are few examples of their laughing together, even just being together sharing an 'ordinary' moment. Everything is intense. Bella and Edward may simply be too busy escaping from the clutches of imminent peril but, given Bella's desperation to escape 'mundane human needs', fun and laughter may be considered too 'human'. Bella frames love in terms of perfection and, indeed, very few teenage marriages and pregnancies would end as well. Bella not only becomes immortal but their life is without any material want; they don't have to work and have more money than they need. This may be constructed as ideal and perfect but it is not real; nor is it liveable. In real life, relationships can be messy, silly, and imperfect—and the love still remain true.

Grounded in traditional fairytale narratives—where good wins over evil and love triumphs against all odds—Bella and Edward are posited as lovers to inspire the 21st-century. Certainly Bella's lessons about love continue through all four books as her role of vampire and wife are constructed and solidified. Edward and Bella may be an unorthodox couple, in terms of their undead nature, but their experience harks back to older fairytales and the stories of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Wuthering Heights*. Bella's passive nature and her dependence upon Edward, through to her physical change into a vampire, teaches readers broad lessons about love that may not translate well into real relationships. It is arguably important to understand which readers absorb such lessons and which ones interact with them, to ensure Bella's lessons are effectively and safely utilised.

Acknowledgements

The authors acknowledge the contribution made by the Collaborative Research Network on Mental Health and Well-being in Rural Communities, supported by the Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education, Commonwealth Government of Australia. The authors would also like to thank Joe Tighe, Tinashe Dune and Virginia Mapedzahama for their insightful debate and comments.

Notes

¹ Julian Barnes, *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* (London: Picador, 1990), 246.

² Daniela N. Borgia, 'Twilight: The Glamorization of Abuse, Codependency, and White Privilege', *The Journal of Popular Culture*, DOI: 10.1111/j.1540-5931.2011.00872; Anthea Taylor, "'The Urge Towards Love is an Urge Towards (Un)death': Romance, Masochistic Desire and Postfeminism in the Twilight Novels', *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 15 (2011): 31-46.

³ See deconstruction of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, where Buffy must balance 'mothering' her younger sister, daytime employment and night-time slaying after her mother's death; Sue Short, *Misfit Sisters: Screen Horror as Female Rites of Passage* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 111-131.

⁴ Stephenie Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* (London: Atom Books, 2008), from Chapter 36 'Bloodlust' onwards.

⁵ For a deconstruction of the lifestyles of 19th- and 20th-century literary vampires see: William Hughes, 'Fictional Vampires in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,' in *A New Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Punter (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 197-210; For an analysis of the lives and sexualities of literary female vampires see: Gina Wisker, 'Love Bites: Contemporary Women's Vampire Fictions,' in Punter, ed. *A New Companion*, 224-238; Judith E. Johnson, 'Women and Vampires: Nightmare or Utopia?' *The Kenyon Review* 15 (1993): 72-80.

⁶ Lydia Kokkola, 'Virtuous Vampires and Voluptuous Vamps: Romance Conventions Reconsidered in Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* Series', *Children's Literature in Education* 42 (2011b): 165-179; Borgia, 'Twilight: The Glamorization; Taylor, 'The Urge Towards Love'; Ann Silver, 'Twilight is Not Good for Maidens: Gender, Sexuality, and the Family in Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* Series', *Studies in the Novel* 42 (2010): 121-38; Christine Seifert, 'Bite Me! or Don't,' *Bitch: Feminist Response to Pop Culture* 42 (2009): 23-25.

⁷ It must be noted that other authors have argued a perception of Bella-as-Feminist within the frames of: reclamation of desire—Diamond, 2011; fan responses—Ananya Mukherjea, 'Team Bella: Fans Navigating Desire, Security, and Feminism'. In Maggie Parke and Natalie Wilson, *Theorizing Twilight: Critical Essays on What's at Stake in a Post-Vampire World* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company Inc., 2011), 70-83; and, reconceptualization—Abigail E. Myers, 'Edward Cullen and Bella Swan: Byronic and Feminist Heroes ... Or Not,' *Twilight and Philosophy: Vampires, Vegetarians, and the Pursuit of Immortality*, ed. Rebecca Housel and J. Jeremy Wisniewski (Hoboken: Wiley, 2009), 147-162.

⁸ *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Season Two, 'Becoming Part Two'.

⁹ See Joyce Ann Mercer, 'Vampires, Desire, Girls and God: *Twilight* and the Spiritualities of Adolescent Girls,' *Pastoral Psychology* 60 (2011): 263-278.

¹⁰ Stephenie Meyer, *Eclipse* (London: Atom Books, 2007), 5.

¹¹ Meyer, *New Moon*, 24-26.

¹² Fleur Diamond, 'Beauty and the Beautiful Beast', *Australian Feminist Studies* 26 (2011): 41-55; See also Short *Misfit Sisters* for a deconstruction of female morality, teachings, and expectations within fairytales in general.

¹³ For his deconstruction of fairytale narratives, see Jack D. Zipes, *When Dreams Came True: Classical Fairytales and Their Tradition* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

¹⁴ Short, *Misfit Sisters*, 29.

¹⁵ Short, *Misfit Sisters*; Zipes, *When Dreams Came True*.

¹⁶ Short, *Misfit Sisters*.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Borgia, 'Twilight: The Glamorization'; Mercer, 'Vampires, Desire'.

¹⁹ For an interesting study on love at first sight, see Christopher Matthews, 'Love at First Sight: The Velocity of Victorian Heterosexuality', *Victorian Studies* 46 (2004): 425-454.

²⁰ Stephenie Meyer, *Twilight* (London: Atom Books, 2005), 20.

²¹ Kokkola, 'Sparkling Vampires'.

²² Lydia Kokkola, 'Virtuous Vampires and Voluptuous Vamps: Romance Conventions reconsidered in Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* Series', *Children's Literature in Education* 42 (2011b): 165-179.

²³ Kokkola, 'Sparkling Vampires'.

²⁴ As a note for those who have not read The *Twilight* Series, the Cullen family consists of seven members. Carlisle and Esme play the role of foster-father and foster-mother to five children – Emmett, Rosalie, Alice, Jasper and Edward. Emmett and Rosalie pretend to be twins, while the others all act out roles of foster-siblings. Indeed, within vampire lore, Carlisle would be considered the 'father' of this coven/family as he sired Esme, Rosalie, Emmett and Edward. Alice and Jasper were both sired by vampires external to the Cullen family.

²⁵ Meyer, *Twilight*, 251-253.

²⁶ See the conclusion of: Stephenie Meyer, *Eclipse* (London: Atom Books, 2007).

²⁷ Stephenie Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* (London: Atom Books, 2008); see Chapter 28 'The Future'.

²⁸ Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 717; see also Mercer, 'Vampires, Desire' for her comparison of the Cullen family structure to Mormon beliefs.

²⁹ Meyer, *Eclipse*, 156.

³⁰ Ibid., 156-157.

³¹ Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 360.

³² See an example in Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 528; see Short, *Misfit Sisters*; Zipes, *When Dreams Came True* for a deconstruction of heroes in fairytales.

³³ Borgia, 'Twilight: The Glamorization'; Kokkola, 'Virtuous Vampires'; Taylor, 'The Urge Towards'; Silver, 'Twilight is not Good for Maidens'.

³⁴ Meyer, *Twilight*, 47-57.

³⁵ Ibid., 136-141.

³⁶ Stephenie Meyer, *New Moon* (London: Atom Books, 2006), 314-324.

³⁷ Ibid., 25-26.

³⁸ Meyer, *Eclipse*, 14.

³⁹ Jason Davis and Mio Bryce, 'I Love You As You Are: Marriages Between Different Kinds', *The International Journal of Diversity* 7 (2008): 201-210.

⁴⁰ Parkin, 1980, 307 cited in Taylor, 'The Urge Towards Love', 34.

⁴¹ Diamond, 'Beauty and the Beautiful Beast'.

⁴² Meyer, *Twilight*, 9-10.

⁴³ Mercer, 'Vampires, Desire'.

- ⁴⁴ Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 523-524.
- ⁴⁵ Diamond, 'Beauty and the Beautiful Beast'; Short, *Misfit Sisters*; Zipes, *When Dreams Came True*.
- ⁴⁶ See arguments in Diamond, 'Beauty and the Beautiful'.
- ⁴⁷ Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 523-24.
- ⁴⁸ Kokkola, 'Sparkling Vampires'.
- ⁴⁹ Meyer, *New Moon*, 395-399.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., 454.
- ⁵¹ Short, *Misfit Sisters*; Zipes, *When Dreams Came True*.
- ⁵² These two events both take place in *Breaking Dawn*.
- ⁵³ Ibid., 754.
- ⁵⁴ See Mercer, 'Vampires, Desire'.
- ⁵⁵ Diamond, 'Beauty and the Beautiful'; Short, *Misfit Sisters*.
- ⁵⁶ Taylor, 'The Urge Towards'; Seifert, 'Bite Me!'.
- ⁵⁷ Barnes, *A History of the World*, 232. As an aside, this quote is found within the sort story 'Parenthesis', chosen as an example of a short story exploring love and attachment in the first-person, just as Bella does in *Twilight*, where both find their space and place within a relationship.
- ⁵⁸ See Bella's internal debate in Meyer, *New Moon*, 325-326.
- ⁵⁹ See Diamond, 'Beauty and the Beautiful'; Mercer, 'Vampires, Desire'; Seifert, 'Bite Me!'.
- ⁶⁰ Emily Bronte, *Wuthering Heights* (London: Penguin Books, 1847/2009), 94.
- ⁶¹ See Mercer, 'Vampires, Desire'.
- ⁶² Lord Byron, in a letter to Thomas Moore, 5 July 1821.
- ⁶³ Diamond, 'Beauty and the Beautiful'.
- ⁶⁴ Meyer, *Eclipse*, 463-470.
- ⁶⁵ See Diamond, 'Beauty and the Beautiful'; Kokkola, 'Sparkling Vampires'; Taylor, 'The Urge Towards'.
- ⁶⁶ See Diamond, 'Beauty and the Beautiful'; Mercer, 'Vampires, Desire'; Seifert, 'Bite Me!'.
- ⁶⁷ See Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*: Chapter 18 'There are no words for this'.
- ⁶⁸ Diamond, 'Beauty and the Beautiful'; see also Short, *Misfit Sisters* for Buffy's experiences.
- ⁶⁹ See Meyer, *Twilight*, 299; see also Diamond, 'Beauty and the Beautiful'; Short, *Misfit Sisters*.
- ⁷⁰ Diamond, 'Beauty and the Beautiful'.
- ⁷¹ See Kokkola, 'Sparkling Vampires'.
- ⁷² Short, *Misfit Sisters*.
- ⁷³ Kokkola, 'Sparkling Vampires'.
- ⁷⁴ See Mercer, 'Vampires, Desire'.
- ⁷⁵ Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 690.
- ⁷⁶ Orson Scott Card, 'Empire' cited in Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 365.
- ⁷⁷ Barnes, *A History of the World*, 240-241.
- ⁷⁸ Bronte, *Wuthering Heights*.
- ⁷⁹ Meyer, *New Moon*, 75-82; see also Kokkola, 'Sparkling Vampires'.
- ⁸⁰ Diamond, 'Beauty and the Beautiful'; Mercer, 'Vampires, Desire'; Seifert, 'Bite Me!'.
- ⁸¹ See the first chapters of Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, before the wedding.
- ⁸² See Seifert, 'Bite Me!'.

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Isn't that Enough? On Love in The Twilight Saga

Jonathan A. Allan

Abstract

This article explores the question and representation of love in The Twilight Saga. At the centre of the Saga is not a tale about vampires and shapeshifters, but rather a love story. The Saga, of course, shares much in common with the popular romance novel, and as such, this study seeks to consider and study how love functions in the Saga. In particular, I argue that Edward's love for Bella is a narcissistic love, which ultimately is less about loving and more about being loved.

Key Words: The Twilight Saga, love, homosocial desire, psychoanalysis, affect theory.

I want to begin with a claim that The Twilight Saga, at bottom, is nothing more than a story about love. The paranormal, monstrous, vampiric qualities of the narrative are not essential to the narrative; that is, the narrative could function just as well if it were about zombies, pirates, or angels. The novel, however, would not function – indeed could not – if the question of love were not central to its narrative. Moreover, the homosocial desire that runs throughout the novel is dependent upon expressions of love, and implicitly in the ways in which heteronormativity has structured love and desire as an exchange of commodities amongst patriarchy. In this essay, therefore, I focus specifically on the question of love in The Twilight Saga.

In her article, “‘I would rather wait for you than believe that you are not coming at all’: Revolutionary Love in a Post-Revolutionary Time,’ Robyn Marusco, in the opening sentence, writes: ‘[s]till at the risk of seeming ridiculous, one cannot but concur with Che Guevara that the true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love.’¹ Regardless of a move away from ‘affect’ that influenced the academy for several decades, scholars have once more returned to the ‘ridiculous’ question of love. In the case of Marusco, love is understood to be more ridiculous than the idea of revolution – that is, in our age, it is apparently easier to imagine revolution than it is to imagine love. And yet, at the centre of popular culture is a lengthy story that is ultimately about love. How then do scholars reconcile this interest in love? Indeed, this is precisely the question that motivates this paper.²

Margaret E. Toye has rightly observed that ‘love [...] needs to be taken as a serious, valid and crucial subject for study,’³ and it seems that a study of *Twilight* must actively and productively engage with the question of love. I admit that I find it difficult to disagree with Toye, and perhaps I am too convinced by her argument, nevertheless, scholars must return to the question of love without reducing it down to its sentimentality and its happily ever afters. The task at hand, thus, is one that aims to understand love and its vicissitudes. Oddly enough, however, it seems that theories of love continue to be impoverished; accordingly, this study is as interested in the question of love as it is in developing and contributing to the growing field of ‘Love Studies’ as Anna Jónasdóttir has called it.⁴

The Twilight Saga, which perhaps finds its closest generic affinity in the popular romance novel, offers a provocative example for the study of love. Barbara Fuchs has explained that ‘readers are often able to identify romance almost tacitly: they know it when they see it’⁵

and one might add, when they *feel* it. Fuchs indeed informs that her students often call it 'a fairy-tale feeling'.⁶ The romance novel and its corollary, love, are a 'feeling' that one is able to recognize immediately; however, what does love look like? How does one anatomize, theorize, deconstruct love? And what can this field of study contribute to a study of *Twilight*? Before turning to The Twilight Saga, I theorize and explore the question of love, so as to provide some working definitions or notions that facilitate a closer reading of love in The Twilight Saga.

Recent scholarship on love, often enough a part of what Patricia Clough calls 'the affective turn',⁷ in literary and cultural studies, tends to drift away from the 'sentimental' or the 'romantic,' and if not, at least treats these notions with caution. Indeed, it can be argued that a significant part of 'affect theory' has focused on what Silvan Tomkins called 'negative affects,'⁸ for example, shame and humiliation. Often enough, scholars of love find it difficult to distinguish between types of love, and I find myself less and less interested in 'sentimental' or 'romantic' love, and more interested in some overarching notion of 'love.' There must be some commonality, some *thing* that binds together all of these 'types' of love.

Michael Hardt in his perceptive and smart article 'For Love or Money,' picks up on the challenge of love and its types; he writes,

The love of the couple and the family, for example, the dominant conceptions of love in our current vocabulary, are most often considered to be a private affair, whereas love of country, probably the most recognized form of public love today, is most often seen as operating outside the sphere of intimacy.⁹

Even with this definition of love, which intrinsically recognizes a competing love between the public and the private, I find myself unwilling to accept that the 'private' nature of love of the 'couple' and 'family' can be positioned alongside one another. Michel Foucault soundly polemicized 'the parent's bedroom',¹⁰ in the opening pages of *The History of Sexuality* (admittedly, I am getting ahead of myself and positioning love alongside the utilitarian value of sex and its subsequent production, a point to which we shall return when consider The Twilight Saga). But, still, even the notion of 'couple' and 'love' is endowed with both a private meaning and a very public meaning. The fight for marriage equality, which at bottom is a legal recognition of the couple-as-couple freely entering into a contract that validates their status as a couple, is intensely public, not only in its disagreement with the laws against so-called 'same-sex marriage,' but also in the felicitous and nearly utopian space of the wedding, which is fundamentally public, demanding of witnesses, who are to remain silent *if* there are no lawful objections. The marriage is only confirmed upon the signing of papers, in front of witnesses—one is reminded here of the Portuguese proverb, 'If marriage were a good thing, it wouldn't need witnesses'—and a justice of the peace, and by the culminating and performative moment, the kiss.

The problem with love (like marriage) is precisely that it is seemingly (and erroneously) figured as a unification that denies the subjectivity of individuals, and this is certainly the case in the popular romance novel, with which *Twilight* shares much in common. When lovers love, they often claim they have found their 'soul mate' or the person who 'completes them, as is the case in *Twilight*, and it is this notion of love that needs to be complicated and critiqued. Hardt calls this kind of love 'narcissistic love,'¹¹ which is not about the amorous other (I am consciously avoiding the paternalistic notion of lover and beloved), but about the amorous other's role in fulfilling the lover's own sense of self. Love cannot function in such a fashion, Hardt explains,

Love conceived as a process of unification is an obstacle. Such narcissistic love—the love of the same and the love of becoming the same—can be conceived of as a political form of

love, but one that is the author of the most revolutionary political projects: the love of race at the foundation of white supremacy, the love of nation that grounds nationalism, the love of both race and nation that supports fascism, and so forth.¹²

Admittedly, Hardt's project seems quite far removed from the interests of the popular romance novel, and more specifically *The Twilight Saga*, but there is still, I believe, much to be learned from Hardt. Narcissistic love—a love that will be found throughout the *Saga*—becomes what Lauren Berlant, in response to Hardt, calls 'bad love.' It is 'bad love' precisely because it is not about transformation, not about a utopian (politically motivated) end. Hardt argues that,

a political love must transform us, that is, it must designate a becoming such that in love, in our encounter with others we constantly become different. Love is thus always a risk in which we abandon some of our attachments to this world in hope of creating another, better one.¹³

This is Hardt's political project of love, a love, which is not about sameness and similitude, but instead is about difference. Love is not about melting into one another and become a now unified subject; instead, we must be intimate with one another and yet still and steadfastly we must embrace our differences.

Lauren Berlant writes that 'love is not ethical,' whether it is 'good' transformative love, or 'bad narcissistic love.'¹⁴ Berlant further (and smartly) problematizes love. If Hardt is interested in the 'upside of love, the desire to induce change without trauma,'¹⁵ Berlant argues instead that,

love is one of the few situations where we desire to have patience for what isn't working, and affective binding that allows us to iron things out, or to be elastic, or to try a new incoherence. This is the main upside of making love a properly political concept, it seems to me. A form of affective solidarity that admits the irrationality of the principle attachment.¹⁶

Love, for Berlant, thus, is inherently irrational, but nevertheless, we (as lovers) are patient enough (or at least we should be) to try and 'iron things out, or be elastic, or to try a new incoherence.' A definition of love, such as this one, seems to share something in common with Alain Badiou's conception of love,

To give up at the first hurdle, the first serious disagreement, the first quarrel, is only to distort love. Real love is one that triumphs lastingly, sometimes painfully, over the hurdles erected by time, space, and the world.¹⁷

Real love becomes akin to (or another kind of) 'good love,' or non-narcissistic love, transformational love. Berlant, at times, seems to be uncomfortable with 'love' (as are so many critical theorists), and she admits that she has previously 'advocat[ed] for "intimacy" and "attachment" as substitutes,'¹⁸ but surely a 'substitute' still (and necessarily so) calls upon—even if only as a sort of Derridean trace—the original or the ideal that has been displaced in favour of the substitute.

Berlant's project is one that calls for 'a bigger imagination of the affective dimensions that it would take to (re)build the world.'¹⁹ Admittedly, I am taken by the call for a 'bigger imagination,' which I take as essential to the development of love studies. The project of love—whether it be political, romantic, sentimental, relational, familiar, religious, otherwise—must be about a 'bigger imagination.' Likewise, we must not consider love as *just* 'romantic' or

'political' (though I'm not convinced by that 'or' and instead prefer 'and'). We must return, as Badiou reminds, to Rimbaud's remark that 'as we know, love needs re-inventing.'²⁰ Thus, and with all of this in mind, I return now to the earlier questions and task of this paper, particularly, how we might go about considering and understanding how love works in *The Twilight Saga*. Implicitly, as Berlant argues, it must be admitted 'that love asks too much and too little,'²¹ which seems to call upon Roland Barthes, who described love as 'the muck of language: that region where language is both *too much* and *too little*.'²²

To study love is to confront the 'muck of language,' and it requires 'a lot of patience for forcefully conflicting aims, and for working out what forms satisfaction will take.'²³ Berlant's project, like Hardt's, is one that recognizes that love cannot be *just* one thing; instead love must be open and transformative. Berlant's formulation of love as a political project would 'provide the courage to take the leap into a project of better relationality that would give us patience with the 'without guarantees' part of love's various temporalities.'²⁴ A conception of love, such as this, would not be dependent upon the happily ever after, which must be recognized as an anti-temporal conclusion (which is inherently oxymoronic since the romance novel concludes with the promise of something beyond the conclusion).

At this point, and with this theorizing in mind, it seems appropriate to shift attention to the textual example of *The Twilight Saga* and its various adaptations, which I treat not as separate entities, but as affinities. The *Twilight Saga* most easily finds its generic corollary in popular romance fiction, which depends upon a narrative that 'centres around two individuals falling in love and struggling to make the relationship work' and moreover 'the lovers who risk for each other and their relationship are rewarded with emotional justice and unconditional love.'²⁵ Throughout, *The Twilight Saga*, readers are treated to the love-story—and its many trials and tribulations—of Edward Cullen, vampire, and Bella Swan, human. The 'love story' is at the centre of the narrative, and, as I suggested previously, Edward need not be a vampire for the story to function successfully.

The question being considered here is one that takes into account the descriptions and understandings of love that the *Saga* provides. In particular, I argue that the novel is dependent upon a 'bad love' (or a 'bad romance'), which demands the surrender of subjectivity to the unification of lovers. When Bella Swan declares, 'I want to be a monster, too,'²⁶ we can begin to contemplate the complexity of love in the *Saga*. Bella's love for Edward would seem to oscillate between 'good love' and 'bad love.' Earlier in *Eclipse*, Bella explains, '[t]he date for my transformation was tentatively set.'²⁷ If love, as a political project, is transformative as Hardt and Berlant have suggested, then surely Bella's love could contain a positive potential, but so much of her love is not dependent upon a transformation as it is on a conversion. I would suggest that a conversion depends upon more than transformation insofar as conversion demands a renunciation of the self to become some *thing* else. Bella does not just have a transformation; instead she will be *transformed* by the actions of someone else. During the 'transformation' (not Hardt's or Berlant's use of the word, but Meyer's), we read that Edward 'shoved the needle straight into her heart,' a needle that contains Edwards' 'venom.'²⁸ Bella's relation to Edward (and Jacob) and her desire to love and be loved are problematic precisely because it would seem one could argue that she is free to make these decisions. But it is important that we remember that 'choice' need not always mean the 'right' or 'good' choice. Without wishing to moralize, the point to be noted here is that love for Bella is dependent upon a transformation of her choosing, but that can only be completed by the lover(s).

Where love is even more problematic is in the homosocial space of Edward and Jacob. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has demonstrated how homosocial desire is found throughout the history of literature. The homosocial refers to 'social bonds between person of the same sex,'²⁹ for instance, Edward and Jacob. For Sedgwick, the homosocial can be 'applied to such activities

as “male bonding,” which may, as in our society, be characterized by intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality³⁰ which certainly seems to be the case throughout *Twilight*. Indeed, it would seem that one could argue that the bulk of the Saga is quite terrified of sexuality *tout court* (and yet, I would be remiss if I did not note, at the very least, the very queer potential throughout The Twilight Saga).

Homosocial desire, as Sedgwick has aptly demonstrated, can be structured as a triangle, which ‘schematizes erotic relations,’ and Sedgwick draws on René Girard’s recognition that these triangles often enough are about ‘two males [who] are rivals for a female.’³¹ In these triangles the males are *as* interested in each other as they are in the amorous other. Sedgwick explains that ‘in any male-dominated society, there is a special relationship between male homosocial (*including* homosexual) desire and structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power.’³² The world of *Twilight* is, one quickly recognizes, a world that is highly patriarchal in form and structure. Ultimately, for homosocial desire to function in *Twilight*, we must find ‘the traffic of women’ which is central to Sedgwick’s triangle.³³ The traffic of women refers to ‘the use of women as exchangeable, perhaps symbolic, property for the primary purpose of cementing the bonds of men with men.’³⁴ The Twilight Saga can ostensibly be summarized as a series of triangles, all of which include the exchange of Bella between men (and even the Volturi can be included here).

Where I will depart from Sedgwick is in the negotiation of love and desire. Sedgwick prefers to speak in terms of desire because “love” is more easily used to name a particular emotion, and “desire” to name a structure.’³⁵ I agree with Sedgwick that desire is something of a governing structure in each of these triangles; however, I want to contend that desire and love cannot be separated that cleanly in the case of The Twilight Saga. That is, the relationship between love and desire is so tightly bound together in the context of the romance novel that it is essential that the ‘trafficking of women’ be seen in the context of ‘love,’ especially narcissistic love that seems to exist especially well throughout the novel and the various triangles. Jacob and Edward often see their actions as a demonstration of ‘love’ rather than ‘desire,’ and it is imperative that these actions be considered in this light. If homosocial and homosexual form a continuum,³⁶ so to must desire and love.

While the bulk of my concern is with the relation triangle between Edward and Jacob, it must be admitted that the novel allows for a number of triangles, which sustain a Sedgwickian reading. Early in the Saga, Edward recounts ‘the emotion of jealousy,’ asking Bella if she ‘remember[s] the day that Mike asked [her] to the dance.’³⁷ In this moment, a homosocial relation is established, but more to the point, the desire for Bella is matched by the emotions inside Edward, provoked by Mike, ‘I was surprised by the flare of resentment, almost fury, that I felt’ Edward explains.³⁸ Edward’s interest in Bella is as important as his interest in how she would respond to Mike. Homosocial desire, as this brief scene indicates, is about the relations not only between the lover and the amorous other, but also the homosocial other, who performs an equally important role as other potential lover.

For all of the desire that is implicit to this ‘trafficking’ of Bella, also present is the question of love. The love that Edward feels, that he attempts to explain, is wholly a narcissistic love,

‘Of course Rosalie *is* beautiful in her way, but even if she wasn’t like a sister to me, even if Emmett didn’t belong with her, she could never have one tenth, no, one hundredth of the attraction you hold for me.’ He was serious now, thoughtful. ‘For almost ninety years I’ve walked among my kind, and yours...all the time thinking I was complete in myself, not realizing what I was seeking. And not finding anything, because you weren’t alive yet.’³⁹

Thus, even though this meditation comes out of a discussion about homosocial desire, the discussion is clearly about the meaning of love and its relation to the subjectivity of the self. Edward is *incomplete* without Bella. Bella, by no action of her own, *completes* Edward. She serves a pragmatic purpose. Edward's completion (of his own sense of self) is dependent upon the amorous other. This notion of love, a love that is dependent upon unification (a unification that will not fully happen for another few volumes of the Saga) is a 'narcissistic love.'⁴⁰ It is not about Bella; it is about Edward.

This narcissistic love is not just, however, confirmed by Edward. Indeed, Alice confirms this narcissism,

'You're worrying about all the wrong things, Bella. Trust me on this – none of us are in jeopardy. You are under too much strain as it is; don't add to it with wholly unnecessary worries. Listen to me!' she ordered, for I had looked away. 'Our family is strong. Our only fear is losing.'

'But why should you—'

Alice interrupted this time, touching my cheek with her cold fingers. 'It's been almost a century that Edward's been alone. Now he's found you. You can't see the changes that we see, we who have been with him for so long. Do you think any of us want to look into his eyes for the next hundred years if he loses you?'⁴¹

As problematic as this passage is, especially when the next words are 'my guilt,' I want to bracket these concerns, at least initially, so as to focus on the love that is being expressed by Edward and Alice. The love is problematic, once more, precisely because it cannot be an ethical relationship. At no point in this discussion, for instance, has anyone considered Bella's own relation to the love; instead, Bella is *necessary* for Edward's happiness. Bella becomes a cure to Edward's sadness and Bella, if she removes herself, would be the cause of his sadness if she were to leave (and evidently, the subsequent worry of his family). A love, if it can even be called that, such as this is one that negates Bella's subjectivity so as to allow for Edward's sense of self to flourish freely and happily (ever after).

The problem with a love such as the one that Edward (and the Cullens) demand is that it can only fail. Bella recognizes this and in the epilogue to *Twilight* even comments on this, 'I love you more than everything else in the world combined. Isn't that enough?'⁴² How could a love that Edward depends on for his own sense of security of self ever satisfy his ever demand? His response, 'Yes, it is enough [...] enough for forever.'⁴³ Her love is *enough* if it is a love *for forever*. It is a love that must extend beyond the temporal now to the atemporal happily ever after that negates the possibility of change and transformation. This is narcissistic love at its finest, and indeed, its most monstrous...but, at this point, we have only considered the first volume of the Saga.

The problem, thus, to be attended to here is that the love that the Cullens' demand is one that requires that love 'cure' Edward of his loneliness, and secondly, it demands Bella's alienation and masochism. This is not to suggest that Bella receives nothing out of this love, arguably she does, but the principle being attended to is how love is being defined, what is being demanded, and how love functions in *The Twilight Saga*. Upon consideration of these two problems, it will be necessary to return to the governing homosocial structure.

Bella's desire for love, and the way that she figures love, is in line with the ways Jessica Benjamin speaks of masochism and love. Benjamin notes the importance of identificatory love,

for instance, the father-daughter love bond, and how this may come to influence secondary love cycles. Benjamin explains,

The thwarting of an early identificatory love with the exciting outside is damaging to any child's sense of agency, in particular to the sense of sexual agency. Such early disappointment may well lead to relationships of subordination or passivity—with or without sexual enjoyment. Unfortunately, this solution has the cast of normalcy for women. But we must note that women seek a form of reparation in these relationships. They are drawn to ideal love for a second chance, an opportunity to attain, at long last, a father-daughter identification in which their own desire and subjectivity can finally be recognized.⁴⁴

Whether we agree with psychoanalysis or not is not the concern of this paper; instead, it does behove the critic to consider the argument Benjamin puts forward in relation to the love being described in the Saga. Indeed, it is quite clear that Bella's own 'early identificatory love' with the father has been thwarted, whether by geographical or psychic distance, and moreover that her love for Edward is caught up in questions of 'enough.' She asks, as we have already considered, at the close of the first volume if her love is enough.⁴⁵ Bella is not speaking here about the Winnicottian 'good enough,' but rather about the enough of perfection and idealization. 'Am I perfect enough to be loved by you, Edward?' would become the governing question that defines her own relationship to the love being exchanged, and more problematically, her own 'desire and subjectivity.'

The problem of love, described as such, is twofold: one that Edward demands it (a point to which we shall return), and two, that she accepts it as such. She has bought into a romantic myth that holds that 'the man will provide access to a world that is otherwise closed to her.'⁴⁶ Throughout the Saga, Bella desires that Edward *convert* her, which is to say, 'provide access to a world that is otherwise closed to her.'⁴⁷ What kind of 'love' then is this? Love such as this demands 'acts of self-abnegation [that] are in fact meant to secure access to glory and power of the other.'⁴⁸ In *Eclipse*, arguably the most interesting volume of the *Saga*, questions of sacrifice and abnegation are present throughout, at one point, Bella thinks,

I wondered if I was a monster. Not the kind that [Edward] thought he was, but the real kind. The kind that hurt people. The kind that had no limits when it came to what they wanted.

What I wanted was to keep him safe, safe with me. Did I have a limit to what I would do, what I would sacrifice for that? I wasn't sure. [...] He looked into my eyes for a long time. I wondered what he was looking for, and what it was that he found. Was the guilt as thick on my face as it was in my stomach – sickening me?⁴⁹

This can hardly be an 'ethical' or 'healthy' loving relationship, when Bella seems to be, once more, struggling with feelings of guilt and inadequacy. Readers are reminded once more of the question that closes *Twilight*, 'isn't that enough?'⁵⁰ Bella recognizes the love that Edward demands will require that she 'sacrifice' something, but she is not yet certain of what that sacrifice will be. Readers of the Saga will know that she sacrifices her humanity so as to save the child that she and Edward have created (and a significant feminist critique is to be made here about The Twilight Saga as an abortion allegory; however, that is another paper), but

ultimately, she will sacrifice her mortality. Edward's love is not one that ends 'happily ever after'; instead it demands it. Only a love that is forever is good enough. Love such as the love that Bella is attempting to attain is one that 'takes the passive form of accepting the other's will and desire as one's own.'⁵¹ This is a narcissistic love, which negates the narcissism of Bella, for the narcissism of Edward.

The Twilight Saga makes clear on numerous occasions that Edward becomes *whole* through Bella. Her love assures his subjectivity. Indeed, Alice goes so far as to speak of Bella as the *cure* to his loneliness. In many regards, we are reminded throughout the *Saga* that, 'love is all we need to overcome absence—and loneliness is the absence we need to overcome' as Thomas Dumm summarizes Cordelia in *King Lear*.⁵² The problem of loneliness, or rather, a problem of loneliness is that, 'at its worst, loneliness is a denial of the possibility of a politics of becoming,'⁵³ which returns to a politics of love, such as the one Hardt and Berlant are theorizing. Edward is lonely and through love he is cured of his loneliness, but he becomes anxious or fearful (and so too does his family) of how he would survive without Bella. Indeed, Alice goes so far as to ask (of Bella), 'Do you think any of us want to look into his eyes for the next hundred years if he loses you?'⁵⁴

The cure to loneliness cannot be merely an encounter with the other, nor can the cure simply be a falling in love with an amorous other. The problem of loneliness is, at bottom, a problem that is constitutive and unique to the self, and can only be cured through an evaluation of the self. Nor, I want to suggest, is the cure to Edward's loneliness due to a failure or inability to love. Instead, Edward's loneliness, and its cure, can only happen through a sadistic demand to be loved. If Bella's love is masochistic, as we have seen alongside Jessica Benjamin, then the corollary must be sadistic. Edward demands that Bella love him perfectly and totally even if at the cost of her own subjectivity. Bella fulfils Edward's need to be loved and more importantly allows for Edward to develop and understand—fully and wholly—his subjectivity.

The questions to which I continue to return, 'isn't that enough?'⁵⁵ asked by Bella at the close of *Twilight* and 'do you think any of us want to look into [Edward's] eyes for the next hundred years if he loses you?'⁵⁶ asked of Bella, have as much to do with Bella as they do of Jacob. And these questions become central to problem of homosocial desire throughout The Twilight Saga. The biggest threat to Edward throughout the *Saga* is not the Volturi, but rather Jacob. Jacob becomes, in many ways, the most—at least potentially so—disruptive force in Edward's search for self.

This study, thus far, has considered the ways in which the love throughout the *Saga* is a bad love, but as I come to the closing sections of this paper, I return to an earlier paradigm of homosocial desire. I suggested above that I would adopt Sedgwick's theory, but would ask that we begin to theorize the place of love in the paradigm. Sedgwick clearly associates love with an emotion, and desire with a structure; however, The Twilight Saga, and its exploration of love, demands recognition of how love folds into homosocial desire. Love may very well be a sentimental and romantic notion, but, as we have seen, it is highly enmeshed in structures of desire and subjectivity. There can be no doubt that Bella functions as the object being trafficked and as the object being used as cure. To these ends, I turn now to what can disrupt the cure and how this is still a part of the governing triangular (and inherently patriarchal) structure of homosocial desire.

Homosocial desire, a structure that is inherent to the romance novel, becomes even more complicated when one begins to theorize it in tandem with narcissistic love, wherein the survival of one of the lovers is dependent upon the beloved (now no longer amorous other). Jacob, as readers of the *Saga* know, is the force that often enough comes between Bella and Edward. Likewise, it is clear throughout the *Saga* that Bella is confused by the homosocial

relations between Jacob and Edward, and further confused by which of the two she loves. One of the most famous lines that appears in *Eclipse* clearly exemplifies this confusion,

And I realized that I'd been wrong all along about the magnets. It had not been Edward and Jacob that I'd been trying to force together, it was the two parts of myself, Edward's Bella and Jacob's Bella. But they could not exist together, and I never should have tried.⁵⁷

Bella recognizes that she is not certain which of the two she loves; moreover, she recognizes that she cannot love them both (at least not in the same fashion). But once more, as is so common throughout the Saga, Bella must renounce (or at the very least repress) her own desires and her own subjectivity. The point that I wish to highlight, however, is the ways in which homosocial desire is conceived of throughout the Saga. In what follows, I wish to return to an earlier scene in *Eclipse*, wherein Bella's survival is at stake, and homosocial desire and subsequent paranoia reaches its climax.

The scene from *Eclipse* famously takes place on the top of a cold mountain and in the confines of a tent. The filmic version is telling by its blueness, a blueness that resoundingly symbolizes coldness. The scene even feels cold.

The temperature was dropping. I could feel it through the down bag, through my jacket. I was fully dressed, my hiking boots still laced into place. It didn't make any difference. How could it be so cold? How could it *keep* getting colder? It had to bottom out sometime, didn't it?⁵⁸

Bella is quite literally freezing. Indeed, 'Edward sat as far from me as possible in the cramped space, afraid to even breathe on me when I was already so cold.'⁵⁹ The narrative has often reminded its readers of just how 'cold' Edward is, his ice-cold touch, he sleeps on top of the comforter. Outside the tent stands Jacob, a warm-blooded shapeshifter. Bella thinks aloud, 'Jacob *did* seem to be well equipped for the snow, better even than the others in his pack with his thicker, longer, shaggy russet fur. I wondered why that was.'⁶⁰ The realization, of course, is that Edward is the ice to Jacob's fire. Jacob *could* provide the warmth that is necessary for Bella to survive, but the jealousy that is inherent to homosocial desire overwhelms this scene.

Bella, who has already felt guilty for her friendship with Jacob, rejects early offers of help from Jacob. This is perhaps the answer to her question, 'what I would sacrifice,'⁶¹ and at this point, which in the romance novel might be akin to the 'point of ritual death,' readers learn of Bella's sacrifice. She sacrifices her own safety, indeed life, to protect Edward's sense of self. Jacob initially offers Bella his coat, to which Edward response, "I don't like this," Edward hissed as Jake zipped the tent door shut. "Just give her the coat."⁶² Again, it is about Edward's feelings rather than Bella's freezing. This scene, which quickly turns erotic, plays on Edward's iciness and Jacob's 'toasty one-oh-eight point nine'⁶³ body temperature. The scene continues, homosocial desire begins to reach its climax, but only as the point of ritual death inches closer and closer towards death.

Edward snarled, but Jacob didn't even look at him. Instead, he crawled to my side and started unzipping my sleeping bag.

Edward's hand was suddenly hard on his shoulder, restraining, snow white against the dark skin. Jacob's jaw clenched, his nostrils flaring, his body

recoiling from the cold touch. The long muscles in his arm flexed automatically.

"Get your hand off of me," he growled through his teeth.

"Keep your hands off of her," Edward answered blackly.

This scene is at times hopelessly pathetic, but at other times one can begin to see the dangers of homosocial desire when the question of love becomes more pronounced. Edward's survival is dependent upon Bella, but he would rather, at least so it seems, lose Bella to the cold than to Jacob, 'a giant dog.'⁶⁴ The fear of losing Bella to Jacob is far riskier and far more damaging than losing her to death, at least for Edward, who fears becoming, at least so it would seem, Orpheus, always looking back, longing to hear Bella sing once more.

The danger at play here is that the homosocial desire between Jacob and Edward, which runs both ways, and which Bella knows she is complicit in, is that, ultimately, it is Edward who is in control. Indeed, Edward is so in control that he is able to read Jacob's mind, 'Do you think you could *attempt* to control your thoughts?'⁶⁵ he complains, as Jacob warms Bella. Later, when Bella has fallen asleep, a dialogue between Jacob and Edward highlights, if it were not obvious enough, the implications of homosocial desire, 'The jealousy...it *has* to be eating at you [Edward]. You can't be as sure of yourself as you see.'⁶⁶ Indeed, shortly thereafter, Jacob defiantly tells Edward, 'She's in love with me, too, you know.'⁶⁷ Jacob and Edward are suddenly intimately involved with one another, negotiating over who is more loved by Bella. Bella is a commodity being exchanged.

Jacob knows that Edward *needs* Bella, 'What is it like? Losing her?' Jacobs asks at one point, and he continues, 'When you thought you'd lost her forever? How did you...cope?'⁶⁸ At this point, we return, once more, to the pressing question that Alice asks of Bella. Edward could not survive without Bella. Indeed, Edward even tried to be away from Bella, as readers of the *Saga* know, but he admits that this 'turned out to the worst mistake of my very long life.'⁶⁹ Edward *needs*, for there can be no doubt, Bella. He proposes alternatives, 'I'd originally chosen [...] to stay with her throughout her human life' or that 'the best one for Bella, would be if she didn't feel as strongly for me.'⁷⁰ Neither of these are acceptable to Edward or Bella (and certainly not to Jacob). Finally, the fourth alternative, and perhaps the most wholly narcissistic and masochistic, requires that Bella convert, 'it's what she wants – at least, she thinks she does'⁷¹ Edward tells Jacob. Jacob admittedly, and painfully admits, 'I can see that you love her...in your way.'⁷² This is perhaps the most telling line of the entire *Saga*, only Jacob can see how Edward 'loves' Bella. Edward loves Bella *in his way*. This is not, for it cannot be, anything more than Edward's love for Bella, which is not about Bella, but is about Edward's own completion.

In this scene, wherein Bella's life was put into jeopardy, readers are able to see the extremes to which homosocial desire becomes complicated when it rests upon a notion of love that demands unification and soul mates. What Edward fears above all is not the loss of Bella – he has demonstrated he was willing to lose Bella to the cold – but the loss of Bella to someone else. His loving philosophy becomes: if I cannot have her, nobody can. Love, such as this, can never be a successful love, for quite simply, to answer Bella's question: 'isn't that enough?'⁷³ the answer must be that it is not.

Readers of *The Twilight Saga*, and especially when we choose to teach the *Saga*, must pay attention to how love functions within the novel. Love is, of course, a sentimental and romantic theme throughout the *Saga*; its many echoes of *Romeo and Juliet* remind readers of this thematic treatment. But we would be remiss if we just accepted this as a sentimental or

romantic love story. The love being explored in the Saga is a dangerous love, a bad romance. Outside of the abusive nature of the relation between Edward and Bella, and even with the inclusion of Jacob, the novel explores love in such a way that the question of 'happily ever after' becomes less a dream and more a demand. Edward can only ever live and love 'happily ever after,' if Bella renounces her own subjectivity, if she admits she cannot reconcile her friendship with Jacob and her love for Edward, and only if she is fully masochistic to the sadistic need for love of Edward.

Notes

¹ Robyn Marusco, "I would rather wait for you than believe that you are not coming at all": Revolutionary Love in a Post-Revolutionary Time,' *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 36.6 (2010): 644.

² This article only makes use of a small number of critical writings on love. In the space of the classroom, students could be provided with a series of writings on love, for example, *Against Love* by Laura Kipnis, *The Four Loves* by C. S. Lewis, *A Lover's Discourse* by Roland Barthes, *Essay in Love* by Alain de Botton, *All About Love: New Visions* by bell hooks, all of which are widely available. Scholarly and theoretical sources might include, *Why Love Hurts* by Eva Illouz, *In Praise of Love* by Alain Badiou, *The Double Flame: Love and Eroticism* by Octavio Paz, *The Summons of Love* by Mari Ruti, *I Love to You* by Luce Irigaray, *Tales of Love* by Julia Kristeva. Love Scholarship is, in many ways, an embarrassment of riches and thus this list is hardly (nor does it intend to be) authoritative. A pedagogical challenge will likely be considering the relation between love and romance, on this question, Susan Ostrov Weisser has put together a substantial anthology, *Women and Romance: A Reader*, which collects important pieces of writing on love, romance, and women.

³ Margaret E. Toye, 'Towards a Poethics of Love: Poststructuralist Feminist Ethics and Literary Creation,' *Feminist Theory* 11.1 (2010): 41.

⁴ Anna. G. Jónasdóttir, 'Mapping and Making/Re-making Love Studies as a Field of Knowledge Interests,' *Proceedings from GEXcel Theme 10: Love in Our Time – A Question for Feminism* (Liköping, Liköping University, 2011), 21.

⁵ Barbara Fuchs, *Romance* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 1-2

⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁷ Patricia T. Clough, 'The Affective Turn: Political Economy, Biomedicine, and Bodies,' *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Grigg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 206.

⁸ Silvan Tomkins, *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader*, ed. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adama Frank (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 55-56.

⁹ Michael Hardt, 'For Love or Money,' *Cultural Anthropology* 26.4 (2011): 677.

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1978), 1.

¹¹ Hardt, 'For Love or Money,' 677.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, 681.

¹⁴ Lauren Berlant, 'A Properly Political Concept of Love: Three Approaches in Ten Pages,' *Cultural Anthropology* 26.4 (2011): 683-84.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 685.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 685-686.

- ¹⁷ Alain Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, trans. Peter Bush (London: Profile Books, 2012), 32.
- ¹⁸ Berlant, 686.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., 687.
- ²⁰ Badiou, 32.
- ²¹ Berlant, 688.
- ²² Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, Richard Howard, trans. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010), 99.
- ²³ Berlant, 'A Properly Political Concept of Love,' 688.
- ²⁴ Ibid., 690.
- ²⁵ Romance Writers of America.
- ²⁶ Stephenie Meyer, *Eclipse* (New York: Little, Brown & Company, 2007), 25.
- ²⁷ Ibid., 24.
- ²⁸ Stephenie Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* (New York: Little, Brown & Company, 2008), 354.
- ²⁹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York, Columbia UP, 1985), 1.
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ Ibid., 21.
- ³² Ibid., 25.
- ³³ Ibid.
- ³⁴ Ibid., 25-26.
- ³⁵ Ibid., 2.
- ³⁶ Ibid., 1.
- ³⁷ Stephenie Meyer, *Twilight* (New York: Little, Brown & Company, 2005), 302-03.
- ³⁸ Ibid., 303.
- ³⁹ Ibid., 304.
- ⁴⁰ Hardt, 'For Love or Money,' 677.
- ⁴¹ Meyer, *Twilight*, 410-411.
- ⁴² Ibid., 498.
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 115-116.
- ⁴⁵ Meyer, *Twilight*, 498.
- ⁴⁶ Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*, 116.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., 117.
- ⁴⁹ Meyer, *Eclipse*, 421.
- ⁵⁰ Meyer, *Twilight*, 498.
- ⁵¹ Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*, 122.
- ⁵² Tim Dumm, *Loneliness as a Way of Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008) 15.
- ⁵³ Ibid., 38.
- ⁵⁴ Meyer, *Twilight*, 411.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., 498.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., 411.
- ⁵⁷ Meyer, *Eclipse*, 608.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid., 487.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid.

- ⁶⁰ Ibid., 488.
⁶¹ Ibid., 421.
⁶² Ibid., 489.
⁶³ Ibid., 490.
⁶⁴ Meyer, *New Moon* (New York: Little, Brown & Company, 2006), 308.
⁶⁵ Meyer, *Eclipse*, 494.
⁶⁶ Ibid., 495-496.
⁶⁷ Ibid.
⁶⁸ Ibid., 498-499.
⁶⁹ Ibid., 501.
⁷⁰ Ibid., 500.
⁷¹ Ibid., 501.
⁷² Ibid.
⁷³ Meyer, *Twilight*, 498.

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Stephenie Meyer's Twilight Saga and the End of History

Robert Tindol

Abstract

The popular *Twilight* books by Stephenie Meyer is noteworthy for its transformation of the traditional vampire from a sinister antagonist to a fairy-tale ideal of the happy and devoted eternal lover who possesses an equally perfect and wholly unproblematic extended family. A more subtle theme of the series is the agelessness and eternal beauty of vampires as a metaphor for the 'end of history,' as originally promoted by economist Francis Fukuyama in his controversial 1992 book of the same name. Fukuyama argued that the fall of the Soviet empire and consequent demise of Marxism would mean that the Western brand of market-driven democracy would irrevocably take over the way the world is run, that little other than relatively minor regional kerfuffles would be in our future, and that the whole world probably would forevermore enjoy peace and happiness and prosperity. The *Twilight* Saga thus takes much of its thematic impetus from this view of history, which was widely promulgated in the popular media in the years before Meyer undertook the writing of the series. As such, the theme provides a 'happily-ever-after' patina to The *Twilight* Saga that perhaps accounts for its popularity in the post-Cold War era.

Key Words: The *Twilight* Saga, Stephenie Meyer, The Cold War, vampires.

Now upon the break of day,
Through this house each fairy stray.
To the best bride-bed will we,
Which by us shall blessèd be;
And the issue there create
Ever shall be fortunate.
-*A Midsummer Night's Dream*¹

Breaking Dawn, the fourth installment of the popular teen series The *Twilight* Saga,² has been acknowledged by its author, Stephenie Meyer, to be based in part on Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.³ The association is very loose at best, and the only direct textual reference to the play in *Breaking Dawn* is a passing comment by series protagonist Bella Swan to the love-sick young shape-shifter Jacob, whom she has gently rejected, that he will eventually discover his true love. The early conflict of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as Shakespearean fans know, is young Demetrius's self-deluded infatuation with Hermia, who is in a passionate and fully mutual relationship with Lysander, while Helena pines away for Demetrius. Eventually (and arguably through the motivation of magic, though not by the agency of magic), Demetrius reciprocates Helena's love, opining that he has finally 'come to my natural taste.'⁴

However, as the opening quotation above suggests, the only metaphorical dawn that breaks in the fourth *Twilight* Saga book is the standard happily-ever-after fairy-tale ending, when Bella has finally become one of the 'bloodsuckers', ... as Jacob and his fellow shape-shifters dismissively call them. Bella can now look forward to an eternity with 107-year-old Edward Cullen, her first and only boyfriend, who is not only a perpetual young and sexy

teenager (as she will now forevermore be), but is highly compassionate, principled, and devoted as well. Moreover, the two will never lack for company, because they will forever live with and enjoy the nurturing companionship of Edward's wonderful 360-year-old 'father' Carlisle; his 'mother' Esme (a decade older in appearance than himself, but actually a few years younger in human time); his perfect 'brother and sister' Alice and Jasper; and his somewhat more obstreperous 'brother-in-law and sister-in-law' Rosalie and Emmett. Others in the close-knit forever-group will undoubtedly include the aforementioned Jacob and his werewolf friends, who all seem fully bonded with the Cullen family. What's more, Jacob has moreover imprinted on Bella and Edward's newborn daughter Renesmee, who conveniently for story-telling purposes, is moving quickly to adolescence, at which time she will cease aging and remain a beautiful young vampire-human hybrid forever.

How could life be more perfect? A few threats will emerge from time to time, of course, such as the sinister Volturi coven from Europe, or a few vicious and malevolent vampire nomads such as James from the first novel. But in all, *The Twilight Saga* is arguably remarkable for its troping of the vampire from the sinister antagonist of *Dracula* vintage, and even from the existentially tortured Barnabas Collins and Louis de Pointe du Lac, and certainly from the bad-boy Spike, to the fairy-tale ideal of the happy and devoted eternal lover who possesses an equally perfect and wholly unproblematic extended family. The ostensible connection of the text to Demetrius's 'love finding its proper object' may therefore be a theme of *Breaking Dawn* and earlier installments of *The Twilight Saga*, but this article will argue that a more subtle theme of the series is the agelessness and eternal beauty of vampires as a metaphor for the 'end of history,' as originally promoted by economist Francis Fukuyama in his controversial 1992 book of the same name. Fukuyama argued that the fall of the Soviet empire and consequent demise of Marxism would mean that the Western brand of market-driven democracy would irrevocably take over the way the world is run, that little other than relatively minor regional kerfuffles would be in our future, and that the whole world probably would forevermore enjoy peace and happiness and prosperity. This idea has had a great deal of traction in popular culture, whether conscious or not, as we shall see.

In other words, the new vintage of vampire tale as a modern teen-media phenomena in the West may owe some of its appeal to the notion that the world will be much better—almost or totally ideal, in fact—if we can only somehow wish away (or force away) any and all external threats so powerful that they linger on and on as perpetual stalemates. For Fukuyama in particular and probably millions of other Americans as well, this ideal was crystallized two decades ago by the fall of the Soviet Union, when America high-fived itself for having eliminated the only major threat from a sufficiently powerful foreign entity. The question is whether this mind-set extends to more mundane matters such as the terrors of high school that seemingly never go away for the eternity of the four final teen years.

Demonstrating that Stephenie Meyer had the end of history in mind when she wrote *The Twilight Saga* is unnecessary, because whether or not she did, she grew up in a country at a time when the assumption was strongly reinforced that things would be much better if longstanding stalemates were somehow neutralized. General cultural literacy would have made this ideology as available to her as the notion that high school students who excel in status athletic events such as football, everything else being equal, will enjoy more prestige than students who do not. Likewise, demonstrating that the vampire is Meyer's idea of the end of history is even more difficult, but probably also unnecessary, given that there is widespread cultural agreement that certain supernatural mythical beings are metaphors for human situations and human traits.⁵ Although there are vast discrepancies among writers and folklore traditions alike in cataloging the characteristics of vampires, one common denominator seems to be that vampires are extremely long-lived and usually eternal, albeit with flaws in their invulnerability

that function narratively almost as an ‘Achilles heel.’ Thus, even though it may sound like a tautology to say that the end of history must describe an existence in which things remain forever the same, this is what the end of history must be if future developments are not to replace the older dispensations. A vampire is frozen in time, frozen in appearance, frozen in his or her final (and usually peak) level of sexual attractiveness, and totally immune to the more mundane requirements of social interaction that force us to conform to standards of comportment. In other words, the vampire is the perfect metaphor for the end of history.

However, more likely for the typical adolescent, the morphing of the sinister vampire into a new type of being presents escapist possibilities from the angst and self-consciousness and self-doubt that plagues most if not virtually all humans of that age. The Buffy gang and even the protagonists of Bram Stoker’s classic novel may be thoroughly bonded, but nothing is quite the same as being eternally young and beautiful and fully loved by both nurturing family and romantic mates, with nothing to fear of the future, with no material desires that cannot be gratified (except for that blood-craving, which seems to act as a sort of kryptonite in the *Twilight* world), and certainly no high-school in-crowd or peer-pressure problems that even register on the scale of concerns. A Cullen family member is the ideal teenager with no problems whatsoever, so the escapist capacity of the roughly 2,000-page series provides many hours of distraction from athletic awkwardness, bad complexions, inability to compete academically and socially, questions about whether one’s existing meager talents will be of any value, and the myriad of other adolescent problems that cannot be defanged (so to speak) through any agency other than hope and the imagination. This is not to say that Stephenie Meyer has invented escapist fantasy, for *Treasure Island* afforded young nineteenth-century readers with a feeling that their fictional peers could be swept up in crackling-good adventures. Nor am I even suggesting that Meyer has retorqued the vampire tale into one of escapism for adolescents, for *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* certainly provides a fictional alternative to traditional high-school anxiety, with the gang visiting the nerdish librarian Rupert to research ways of saving the entire world, while the callow and uninitiated youth in the hallways are mundanely planning their boring dates for the weekend. Instead, The *Twilight* Saga is distinguished for having amalgamated the fairy-tale ending with vampirism.

To return to Fukuyama’s *The End of History and The Last Man*, the word ‘controversy’ is almost an understatement for the reaction that followed its publication.⁶ Fukuyama worked for the U.S. State Department during the Reagan and Bush I administrations, and as one would expect, generally sounds a lot more like Adam Smith in his arguments than Karl Marx. Though *The End of History* is far more than a footnote to *The Wealth of Nations*, there seems to be little incompatibility in Fukuyama’s argument with Smith’s basic assumption that people going about their affairs will impose an apparently subconscious ‘invisible hand’ over economic transactions that will be better, in the long run, than any contrived attempt to influence those transactions by governmental fiat.⁷ Smith argues the following:

When the government, in order to remedy the inconvenience of dearth, orders all the dealers to sell their corn at what it supposes a reasonable price, it either hinders them from bringing it to market, which may sometimes produce a famine even in the beginning of the season; or if they bring it thither, it enables the people and thereby encourages them to consume it so fast, as must necessarily produce a famine before the end of the seasons.’⁸

Even the primogeniture of European society is a bad thing⁹ because it imposes wealth for the oldest son while leaving the younger siblings to fend for themselves.¹⁰

Little surprise, then, when Fukuyama argues that the 'struggle for recognition' will ultimately lead in a sort of Hegelian synthesis to market-driven liberal democracy, and the final stop will culminate in our being regarded 'like adults rather than children.'¹¹ The threat to our well-being is not so much of our own doing (although our lacking self-esteem is certainly a factor that does not help), but rather those arbitrarily-imposed limitations that schools and nations impose on us with the assumption that they are doing so for our own good. Perhaps the imposition of order by regulating bodies cannot be entirely eliminated, but approaching that ideal is presumably a tending toward the ultimate goal of an end to history in much the same manner as a mathematical function that tends toward a limit but never quite reaches it. Fukuyama argues that the end of history does not mean 'that the natural cycle of birth, life, and death would end,' or 'that important events would no longer happen,' but instead, 'that there would be no further progress in the development of underlying principles and institutions, because all of the really big questions had been settled.'¹² Once this has happened, competing systems like Marxism will fall to the wayside because '[l]iberal democracy replaces the irrational desire to be recognized as greater than others with a rational desire to be recognized as equal.'¹³

Though this article is not intended as a Marxist interpretation of *The Twilight Saga*, any invocation of names like Adams Smith, Francis Fukuyama, and Jacques Derrida would be remiss without the inclusion of Karl Marx, and especially his explanations of the nature of commodities, values, and exchange-values in the first volume of *Capital*. Possibly even the entire estimation of the Meyerian vampire could hinge on Marx's comments about value versus exchange value, in which he stated that 'the use-value of material objects belongs to them independently of their material properties, while their value, on the other hand, forms a part of them as objects.'¹⁴ In the high-school world of *Twilight*, by contrast, the vampires have transcended the mundane human exigencies of value, marketing instead in their affection for each other and enjoyment of each other's company. In other words, if individual traits can be reclassified as Marxian 'commodities,' then the Cullen vampires simply do not play the game, nor can they be compelled to do so or in any way penalized for not doing so. Their intrinsic value is thus absolute; their use-value and exchange-value irrelevant.

The Marxist argument about the relevance of high school can also be explored with an analogy synthesized from Terry Eagleton's highly useful classic work *Marxism and Literary Criticism*. 'The social relations between men...are bound up with the way they produce their material life' in 'what is more commonly known by Marxism as the economic "base",'¹⁵ while various social institutions and instruments are employed 'to legitimate the power of the ruling class' as the 'superstructure.'¹⁶ If the economic base is analogized as American high school in all its attention-demanding reality, then the superstructure must be the very social factors that make those exigencies the norm—in other words, the myriad terrifying impositions to perform athletically and possess the proper clothing and good looks and winning personality and so on. Approaching these issues requires textual analysis of two important questions. First, is the world of high school really so bad that an adolescent like Bella Swan would prefer trading her humanity for the more comforting and loving and meaningful world of the non-human Cullen vampires? Second, is her quest to merge body-and-soul with her lover simply the headlong actions of an adolescent, or is it really an 'end of history' that somehow parallels the Fukuyama model?

The first question is easy to answer, and the textual examples are abundant. Therefore, we return once again the question of whether Bella is perfectly secure and comfortable in her world as an American high-school student, or whether she is full of anxiety and somehow made to feel an outsider. The immediate answer is the latter, and textual evidence begins not with an inclusion but an omission: at the beginning of *Twilight*, we find Bella departing Phoenix, where

she has been living for some years with her mother, to take up a new life in her junior year of high school with her father in faraway Forks, Washington. Her previous life is at first an omission simply because she says nothing in the opening pages about any friends from high school or her earlier life, or even about anything she will miss, although she mentions repeatedly in the first volume that she has never had a boyfriend or a date. By page 8, she states that 'Forks High School had a frightening total of only three hundred and fifty-seven—now fifty-eight—students,' and that this would make her 'a curiosity, a freak.'¹⁷ And if she 'couldn't find a niche in a school with three thousand people, what were my chances here?'¹⁸ She is unable to participate in the athletic events that are perennial fomenters of high-school popularity and self-esteem, explaining that she lacks 'the necessary hand-eye coordination to play sports without humiliating myself.'¹⁹ This seems to be the opinion of the student body as well, because '[my] team never passed me the ball.'²⁰ Nor does she have the social status that money often imparts, because she has come to Forks from one of the poorer neighborhoods in her old school district.²¹ And even though several of the new kids eagerly seek her company and the boys attempt to ask her out, it takes Edward's affirmation of her looks before she will even entertain the notion that many of the other kids are much more attractive than she is.

But a competing world-within-the-world is soon beckoning. Before the fifteenth page has even ended, Bella has caught her first glimpse of the Cullen family, who keep to themselves, in part because everyone is so intimidated by their physical perfection. Edward, Jasper, Emmett, Alice, and Rosalie all possess faces that are 'devastatingly, inhumanly beautiful.'²² So endowed with the attributes that normally provide a high-school student with a social advantage, in fact, that it does not even matter that their given names are so 'strange, unpopular.'²³ Bella's other new acquaintances sport names such as Jessica, Mike, Tyler and Eric, but the Cullens are so exceptional that they do not even have to possess the sort of everyday names that would be useful for the self-conscious high-school student who would just as soon blend into the wall.

Edward at first is resistant to Bella, but we find out much later in the first volume that his early reluctance was due to her near-irresistible aroma, and further complicated by the fact that she is the only person—human or otherwise—whose thoughts he is unable to read telepathically. Soon, Bella and Edward are in love, and everything else connected with conventional human time and local are simply a 'muddled blur.'²⁴ Edward occasionally makes a throwaway comment about the environment or some such, proffering that gas-guzzling cars are the 'wasting of finite resources';²⁵ and that the vampires avoid human blood by hunting large mammals, especially high-level predators such as grizzly bears and mountain lions, in part because the predators need to be thinned out occasionally.²⁶ But even in the first volume, the world is pretty much a separate entity for both the Cullens and for Bella—the former watching an occasional news broadcast 'with no glimmer of interest.'²⁷ The only down-side for Edward is almost an after-thought; when asked about the Cullen family's abstention from human blood, Edward explains the difference between his own coven and some (but not all) of the other vampires they know of throughout the world:

The others—the majority of our kind who are quite content with our lot—they, too, wonder at how we live. But you see, just because we've become...dealt a certain hand...it doesn't mean that we can't choose to rise above—to conquer the boundaries of a destiny that none of us wanted. To try to retain whatever essential humanity we can.²⁸

This almost dismissive justification of the Cullen family's altruistic motives toward humanity, and as close as the text gets to any sort of regret for the loss of humanity. In neither *Twilight* nor *Breaking Dawn* does any vampire lament his lot in the world.

Instead, there is eagerness on the part of Bella to become a vampire and join her lover, who cannot have any sort of passionate encounter with her (in other words, sex) without the risk of seriously injuring or even killing her by accident. Meyer certainly deserves credit for imaginatively troping the vampire legend so as to provide for Bella's quite-conservative chastity, but again, traditional fairy tales have seldom if ever had much to do with premarital sex. But lest one assume that vampirism in the *Twilight* world is simply a way to argue for virginity, the fact remains that Edward and Bella indeed consummate their relationship after their wedding at the beginning of *Breaking Dawn* while Bella is still human. Despite a few bruises and overwrought concern from Edward, Bella becomes pregnant and suffers severely from the early signs of the pregnancy even before the two have even settled into their island honeymoon paradise off the coast of South America.

In sum, Bella never really displays in her first-person narrative that she has the slightest misgivings about becoming a vampire. She is apprehensive about the intense pain that one goes through to become an immortal, for in this vampire world, one must be bitten by a vampire who does not drain the blood of the victim or benefactor (this in itself an act of remarkable self-control), but instead leaves the soon-to-be vampire with a venom in the bloodstream that spreads and eventually finishes its work by stopping the heart—for eternity. Once the heart has ceased beating, the vampire never again loses consciousness, never sleeps, does not need to eat, and enjoys remarkable powers such as superhuman strength, near-lightning-fast movement and reflexes, and imperviousness to all physical dangers other than being cut apart and having all body-parts burned. Bella, at least in *Twilight* and *Breaking Dawn*, takes all this in stride.

Therefore, the second question—whether the overall story-line of The *Twilight* Series is an 'end of history' of sorts—is affirmative insofar as Bella seems perfectly content to remain within her own self-absorbed world. She is willing to feign her own death so that her father and mother will be less of a problem (not too many humans should know about vampires, after all), and her entire approach to the inevitability of turning into a vampire with the help of Edward's venom is about as nerve-racking for her as the high-school senior girl who thinks she might want to postpone her marriage as long as possible in order to enjoy the senior prom. Bella can see benefit in maintaining her human form as long as possible, but nonetheless makes perfectly clear before the end of the first volume that she is ready to join the vampire coven and spend eternity with her true love.

As one can see from the above overview and textual analysis, The *Twilight* Series is certainly no veiled conservative argument against socialism, but rather a simple adolescent fantasy that makes for enjoyable and self-absorbing reading among impressionable young people. And even if the Fukuyama argument had little or nothing to do directly with Meyer's writing of the series, *Twilight* nonetheless is not so much a work that displays a pop-culture cheerleading for the American standard of liberal democracy as it is a programme for minimizing the type of uncertainty and self-conscious doubt that is so troubling to adolescents in probably any time and place. As for the Fukuyama book, perhaps the most devastating criticism was that of the late Jacques Derrida, whose *Spectres of Marx* has a great deal to say about Fukuyama's theory—and Marx's spectre that was haunting Europe in the mid-nineteenth century as well. Of course, the entire Marxist prognostication for humankind hinges on the quantity of capital from labor-intensive investments that accreted for the investor like so much excess pizza dough from the rising of bread-yeast. The enticements to become a capitalist and walk all over common people in order to do so is what the Marxist prognostications are all about, and here we certainly have to contextualize carefully if this argument is to continue

sounding relevant to the matter of vampires and adolescent literature. But my argument is that the apparent flaws in the Fukuyama argument are indicative of the way in which the Meyerian fantasy world of *Twilight* functions as adolescent fantasy rather than a view of the world, and for this, Jacques Derrida's argument is persuasive.

Thus, Marx's focus for his 2,800-page magnum opus was the manner in which capital operates in modern society, and especially the manner in which it exploits laborers—hence, the title *Capital*. After the old Soviet empire dissipated in the late 1980s and early 1990s, many scholars in addition to Fukuyama were not only asking if some profound history-turning change had gripped the world, but also if Marx was perhaps simply wrong about the drawbacks of capitalist endeavor—and also wrong about how capitalism would eventually play out on the world stage. The question of 'whither Marx' thereby became a matter of academic concern—and in fact was the motivation for the conference at which Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* was born.²⁹

As often the case with Derrida's deconstructive strategy, he opens the discussion by working away at the 'spectre' metaphor that begins Marx's *Communist Manifesto*, and does so by referencing the equally-famous opening of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in which the ghost of the Danish prince's father walks the ramparts of Elsinore Castle and soon instructs his still-living son to avenge his murder. *Hamlet*, one of the pivotal artistic works of the West in its heralding the changing over to new dispensations while maintaining anxiety over the old ones, is the ideal lead-in for the question of how, precisely 'time is out of joint.'³⁰ Working this phrase thoroughly, Derrida demonstrates the incompatibility of the notion of history's end with the very incompleteness of history that makes the metaphor of spectral presence so vital. Derrida writes:

To this extent, the effectivity or actuality of the democratic promise, like that of the communist promise, will always keep within it, and it must do so, this absolutely undetermined messianic hope at its heart, this eschatological relation to the to-come of an event *and* of a singularity, of an alterity that cannot be anticipated.³¹

What practical concerns would still be spectres walking the ramparts, if not full-blown beastly entities, if history were indeed to end with the current American flavor of liberal democracy still dominating the world scene? Derrida at another point offers a quick shopping-list that includes items seemingly immune from solution by dint of the Cold War having ceased: unemployment, homelessness, economic warfare between the so-called allies that represent Western democracies, organized crime on multinational scales, inter-ethnic wars, and so on.

By the same strategy, what precisely would be wrong with Bella Swan's world of happily-ever-after with her wonderful soul-mate Edward Cullen? The antagonist from the first volume, *Twilight*, was indeed a malevolent entity, but seemingly posed little danger to anyone other than Bella, and even feigned the threat to Bella's mother, who was safely in Florida the whole time. The fourth volume, *Breaking Dawn*, likewise confines its most dangerous encounters to the internecine warfare between vampire covens, with little or no impact on the rest of the world. And although the second and third volumes, *New Moon* and *Eclipse* are not a part of my close analysis, the bellicose encounters of the two novels primarily involve the mate from the first volume who is out for revenge, the further integration of the shape-shifting werewolf-types into the narrative, and the appearance of additional vampires from other parts of the world. In other words, even in Meyer's fictional world, the everyday events of unaware humans goes on with little or no change, just as the large and intractable problems that Derrida describes continue whether or not the United States and Soviet Union have stood down from

their former bellicosity. How can history end, therefore, if problems continue to evolve despite the promise that certain game-changing events will render them forever impotent?

Of course, Bella is happy and her universe is complete if she has no further stories to tell. The facetious answer is that the *Twilight* history ends if there are no more books in the series to write. If, on the other hand, there are further sequels, then surely there will be some sort of dramatic conflict to make the reading worth our while. Just as Jim Hawkins will have another Long John Silver to contend with if he is the subject of another high-sea romance, Bella will have other malevolent vampires at her doorstep if there is a new story to tell within the *Twilight* universe. The stasis of the end of history may work out well in a timeless void, but the very passage of time will always pose issues—in the world of fiction as well as in the real world—in which there is a strong and compelling need to long for the conditions that would make such a carefree existence possible.

In other words, time may once again find itself out of joint. But how can this be if history has ended? Dealing with such questions apparently led Derrida to the now-famous coined word 'hauntology': Repetition *and* first time, but also repetition *and* last time, since the singularity of any *first time*, makes of it also a *last time*. Each time it is the event itself, a first time is a last time. Altogether other. Staging for the end of history. Let us call it a *hauntology*. This logic of haunting would not be merely larger and more powerful than an ontology or a thinking of Being ... After the end of history, the spirit comes by *coming back* [revenant], it figures both a dead man who comes back and a ghost, whose expected return repeats itself, again and again.³²

We cannot, therefore, merely fill in the gaps that exist when we wish that conditions were such that our lives could be more meaningful or fulfilling. And though there are no ghosts in *Twilight*, as there are in Hamlet, the spectre that haunts the world of Forks is that which prevents Bella from sinking into her blissful world as happily as if she were in heaven. If I understand Derrida correctly, he is saying in his general argument that a spectre will continue to haunt Europe whether or not that spectre happens to be the inevitable clash with exploited laborers and their capitalist exploiters. In a parallel manner with the fictional world of Bella Swan—though obviously not the same by dint of the very fact that her world is indeed fiction—a spectre will continue to haunt her comfortable world of Forks, provided that Stephenie Meyer chooses to write a new chapter in the story. There cannot be a spectre haunting the *Twilight* world unless there is a continuing narrative, and the spectre is not a ghost but a being that is conveniently half-living and half-dead. Like Hamlet's cursing the expiation of expiation itself, per Derrida,³³ Bella swan has only the reappearance of the spectre of history to fear in her fictional world. The end of history is therefore the end of narrative. Thus, Bella Swan's world will encompass the possibility of an 'end of history' only if the storytelling ceases, for it is the storytelling that poses the sole choices of either (1) a history that has not ended and is still fraught with dangerous foreign vampires and threats to her and Edward's timeless connubial bliss, or (2) a history that has indeed ended, but only insofar as it has disappeared into the nothingness of narrative silence.

The real world of Soviet retreat on the world stage, of course, does not proffer even two possibilities. If history has therefore not ended, then any tales about its ending are little more than the adolescent fantasies that perhaps find their places more comfortably in the fictional world of adolescent literature. In conclusion, the preceding analysis is not intended to attack the quality of Meyer's *Twilight* Series, for many readers like myself will find them enjoyable reading, and I intend to give my copies to the adolescent offspring of a university colleague

here in China. Happily-ever-after scenarios are hardly original in the world of adolescent and children's literature, and as I previously noted, Meyer has done an interesting and imaginative job in transforming the vampire into a vehicle that allows this time-worn scenario a fresh face. A more intriguing question might be whether prognostications about the end of history are more appropriate in the world of adolescent fiction than in the current-events section of the local bookstore.

Notes

¹ William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. David Bevington and David Scott Kastan (New York: Bantam Classic, 2005), 153.

² To avoid confusion, I will hereafter refer to the entire series by its formal title *The Twilight Saga*, while reserving the title *Twilight* for the first of the four books of the series.

³ 'Twilight Series.' *The Official Website of Stephenie Meyer*, accessed 13 Feb. 2012.

⁴ Shakespeare, 113.

⁵ Guillermo del Toro and Chuck Hogan, for example, contributed an opinion piece to the New York Times titled 'Why Vampires Never Die.' Asserting that '[t]he vampire may originate from a repressed memory we had as primates,' the authors opine that '[m]onsters, like angels, are invoked by our individual and collective needs.' Finally, they conclude that 'the vampire emphasizes the eternal in us.' Whether or not one agrees with their assessments, it is clear that the first order of business in writing the op-ed piece is to group for some symbolic significance for the vampire.

⁶ In fact, an entire book on the critical reaction is available: *After History? Francis Fukuyama and His Critics*, edited by Timothy Burns. For those interested in a quick overview, a two-page on-line review by Jenefer Curtis is available at the *Canadian Journal of Political Science* website, summarizing several of the 13 contributors' arguments.

⁷ Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, ed. Edwin Cannan (New York: Bantam Classic, 2003), 572.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 664.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 705.

¹⁰ The Cullen family, by contrast, is quite egalitarian: Edward may have been born earlier than the others, but he is a valued member for his gift of mind-reading, just as the others are valued in the family for their own unique contributions (Carlisle for his 'human' compassion, Alice for her ability to see the future, the newly-spawned Bella for his ability to protect herself and others, and so on).

¹¹ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the First Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992), xviii-xix.

¹² *Ibid.*, xii.

¹³ *Ibid.*, xx.

¹⁴ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy Volume I*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin Classics, 1990), 177.

¹⁵ Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), 4-5.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁷ Stephenie Meyer, *Twilight* (London: Atom, 2010), 8-9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 64.

²¹ Ibid., 12.

²² Ibid., 17.

²³ Ibid., 18.

²⁴ Ibid., 190.

²⁵ Ibid., 71.

²⁶ Ibid., 188.

²⁷ Ibid., 357.

²⁸ Ibid., 268.

²⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, ed. Bernd Magnus and Stephen Cullenberg (London: Routledge Classics, 2006), ix-x.

³⁰ Ibid., 21.

³¹ Ibid., 81.

³² Ibid., 10.

³³ Ibid., 23.

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Utilizing *Twilight* in the Classroom to Get Students Hooked on Feminist Analysis, or, *Twilight*: The Gateway Drug for Feminism

Natalie Wilson

Abstract

This article argues that *Twilight* is a useful text to examine in Women's Studies courses and other disciplinary courses dedicated to the critical analysis of societal norms that contribute to inequality. Addressing the derision of the text as well as of *Twilight* scholarship, the article counters that the debasement of texts and activities coded as female justifies the academic study of *Twilight*. Further, analysing The Twilight Saga via a feminist lens can 'seduce' students to take a more critical look not only at the Saga itself, but at societal norms and ideologies more generally. Arguing *Twilight* can be utilized as a 'gateway drug' to feminism, the article contends we should not ignore or dismiss such popular phenomenon, but rather incorporate them into our work in the classroom in order to encourage analysis of the ideological underpinnings of culture and further feminist aims.

Key Words: Feminism, post-feminism, women's studies, feminist pedagogy, The Twilight Saga.

Given the predominantly female fan base of the *Twilight* phenomenon, the Saga and surrounding fandom seem to be perfect subjects for feminist analysis—or a mode of analysis that includes the examination of texts, ideas, cultural phenomenon in relation to gender, sex, race, class, sexuality, (dis)ability, body image and so on in relation to issues of social equity and injustice. While the *Twilight* texts, films, and fandom have already been recognized as an important cultural zeitgeist worthy of feminist scrutiny, not much scholarship has focussed specifically on pedagogy, or how and why we might 'teach *Twilight*.' Yet, the realization that the *Twilight* phenomenon deserves feminist attention is in evidence not only in the growing number of publications devoted to analysis of the series, but also via the fact that various Women's Studies courses (as well as courses in Gender Studies and other affiliated departments) now incorporate analysis of the phenomenon into their curriculum. Thus far, as with other courses devoted to the study of popular culture, *Twilight* curriculum has often been derided as lightweight, as frivolous, as a waste of time and money.

Just as the dismissal (and even hatred) of the *Twilight* phenomenon deserves critical examination, so too does this derision of *Twilight* research and pedagogy. As a phenomenon which has been coded as feminine and has undoubtedly caught the female cultural imagination, *Twilight* deserves consideration within Women Studies, an academic discipline devoted to the study of female roles and contributions to society and culture which serves as the academic arm of feminism. Given that the texts and surrounding fandom are rife with material relating to the critical study of gender and how it intersects with race, class, sexuality and so on, the phenomenon seems an obvious location for fruitful feminist analysis, especially as it covers not only broad issues above, but also deals with topics that are near and dear to feminism—violence against women, rape culture, female sexuality, white privilege, heteronormativity, feminist backlash, and changing codes of masculinity.

As the creator and instructor of one of the first semester long courses devoted to studying the Saga and surrounding fandom, I have often been asked to justify my academic

interest in Stephenie Meyer's widely-popular series. For example, the first semester the course ran, a local news station questioned if the course was the best use of educational resources. Such queries remind me of the interrogation Women's Studies has undergone as an academic discipline, with scrutiny of its 'worthiness' all too common. This very scrutiny certainly also fuels concerns about 'sully'ing the discipline by studying texts or cultural phenomenon that are seen as 'lightweight,' or even 'anti-feminist.' However, seeing as the omission of women from scholarship, both as scholars themselves and as the subject of study, prompted the formation of Women's Studies as a discipline in the first place, I find it ironic that there is still a call to omit certain types of female-authored texts and certain female cultural practices, as if studying *Twilight* is not 'feminist enough.' If we choose to police the boundaries of the discipline, and to name certain texts unworthy of curricular inclusion, are we not contributing to the same type of ivory tower mentality that kept women, people of colour, and various Others on the outskirts of academia in the first place? The key is not to omit such work, but to incorporate in a way that interrogates why such a Saga has tapped into a cultural nerve, what it has to teach us about our socio-historical moment, and how it can be utilized to further feminist aims.

From a more general perspective, *Twilight* is useful in the Women's Studies classroom as it aligns with so many of the core interests of the discipline. As an interdisciplinary academic field which explores societal norms of gender, race, class, sexuality, and other factors that contribute to inequality, Women's Studies aims to critique and explore how and why such categories intersect in ways that perpetuate injustice. The Saga, which overall champions rather conventional notions of gender, sexuality, race, class, and belief is the perfect conduit to ask students to consider how such categories intersect to the advantage of some (white male heterosexuals, for example) and the disadvantage of others (e.g. queer women of colour). Given that the Saga also circulates around the notion of true love, romanticizes violence, polices female sexuality, and promotes abstinence, it is a good medium with which to analyse how and why this cultural moment is so fixated on love, romance, 'purity,' and 'traditional marriage' on the one hand, and how this fixation serves to keep gender and other forms of inequality firmly in place on the other.

As the Saga is imbued with racialized representations that do not take white privilege or racism to task, representing, most prominently, Jacob as a violent wolf-of-colour, it also provides the opportunity to interrogate current attitudes about race. As it glorifies consumerism and the wealthy Cullen lifestyle, giving the message that riches, fast cars, and physical attractiveness should be pursued at all costs, the series offers useful material to question our cultural fixation on 'the good life.' Examining how this supposed 'good life' results in unequal access to wealth and power in the Saga, and how this inequality is echoed in the real world, affords the opportunity to prompt student engagement with one of the enduring myths of our time—that richer is always better, that one can 'have it all.' Ultimately, as the Saga offers an uncritical (even glowing—or, more aptly—sparkling) depiction of patriarchal capitalism, it provides all sorts of opportunities to question who benefits from such a system. Most pervasively, the series romanticizes the current status quo, revelling in rather than condemning gender norms and white male privilege, and, in so doing, imparting some very outdated lessons—that females are damsels in distress that must be saved by a heroic white prince, that 'dark' people are dangerous and violent, and that the highest goals are 'true love' and endless wealth—or, at the very least, life in a designer vampire mansion. As such, the texts offer a plethora of material to discuss societal norms. Further, as many readers fail to see the more problematic implications of the Saga, or write it off as 'just entertainment,' analysing the deeper messages and implications of the series can not only shed light on *Twilight*, but also open the door to the realization that all texts, whether 'popular' or not, affect how we view and interact with the world. Such an approach to texts is a hallmark of Women's Studies, a discipline that

encourages analysis of the ideological underpinnings of culture. Moreover, the debasement of texts and activities coded as female certainly justifies the academic study of *Twilight* within Women's Studies. Finally, a more practical aim is to utilize analysis of the phenomenon as a way to 'seduce' students to adopt a feminist lens, or, even better, to become feminists. In short, I like to consider *Twilight* a 'gateway drug' to feminism.

As has been well documented, perhaps nowhere more so than in the popular disclaimer 'I am not a feminist, but...' feminism is a derided and misunderstood term, wrongly associated with man-hating, bra-burning, and hairy legs. The current popularity of the term 'femi-nazi' speaks to this debasement. This negative view of feminism, and of Women's Studies, is not only present in the 'real world' but also in the academic one with Women's Studies courses often being mocked or seen as 'last resort' courses when all other classes are filled. Just as Women's Studies and feminism are often debased and maligned, so too are those cultural phenomena coded as female/feminine. *Twilight* is no exception. Indeed, the phenomenon's coding as female has fuelled widespread derision. Terms such as Twi-hards, Twi-addicts and Twi-steria represent fans as mindless, over-emotional addicts. Though different in their underpinnings and intent, the debasement of Women's Studies and *Twilight* both stem from the fact that things perceived as feminine or focusing on females, whether feminist theory or *Twilight* fandom, are still not valued in the same way as things perceived as masculine/male. This, in and of itself, is reason enough to study the *Twilight* phenomenon in the Women's Studies classroom.

If we take scholar Janice Radway's model, and look at 'what a literary text can be taken as evidence for,' we might argue *Twilight* proves we have yet to become a post-feminist or post-racial society, let alone post-Puritanical.¹ Indeed, the series is particularly relevant to our so-called post-feminist milieu, which, in general, is the idea that feminism is dead and/or no longer needed—a view I certainly encounter in my classrooms! Our era, as Angela McRobbie documents, often claims to be 'beyond feminism' and relies on a simplistic notions of choice to make that claim, as if we now live in 'a more comfortable zone where women can choose for themselves.'² This emphasis on 'choice' reverberates in post-feminist arguments that claim women are now free to choose whatever path they desire—a claim that flattens out the differences between varying choices as if 'choosing' to have a bikini was is 'empowering' and just as salient as 'choosing' what career to pursue. Such false paths to liberation frame choice itself as feminist, rather than assessing what types of choices are being offered and in what contexts. Or as Katha Pollit puts it, 'These days anything is feminist as long as you 'choose' it ... no matter how dangerous or silly or servile or self-destructive it is.'³ Indeed a rhetoric of 'choice' has been consistently used to bolster pro-patriarchal, anti-choice ideology in recent decades.⁴ Seeing as Meyer seems to have taken this concept of choice to heart, as if ANY choice is a feminist choice, her texts are a fruitful place to examine the current emphasis on choice and post-feminism. For example, when asked, 'Is Bella an anti-feminist heroine?' Meyer replies:

When I hear or read theories about Bella being an anti-feminist character, those theories are usually predicated on her choices. In the beginning, she chooses romantic love over everything else. Eventually, she chooses to marry at an early age and then chooses to keep an unexpected and dangerous baby. I never meant for her fictional choices to be a model for anyone else's real life choices. She is a character in a story, nothing more or less ... do her choices make her a negative example of empowerment? For myself personally, I don't think so....In my own opinion (key word), the foundation of feminism is this: being able to choose. The core of anti-feminism is, conversely, telling

a woman she can't do something solely because she's a woman...One of the weird things about modern feminism is that some feminists seem to be putting their own limits on women's choices. That feels backward to me. It's as if you can't choose a family on your own terms and still be considered a strong woman. How is that empowering? Are there rules about if, when, and how we love or marry and if, when, and how we have kids? Are there jobs we can and can't have in order to be a 'real' feminist? To me, those limitations seem anti-feminist in basic principle.⁵

Meyer's use of the word 'empowerment' signals her immersion in our post-feminist moment, a milieu which has de-politicized the concept of choice, and, more broadly, of feminism. No longer is female empowerment so much about equal pay and access to contraception, now it's about the 'right' to get 'va-jazzled' or the 'choice' to have a nose job. (In *The Twilight Saga*, it is about the choice between Edward and Jacob.)

Just as the texts and Meyer's commentary about them provide useful topics to analyse in the feminist classroom, including issues of choice and post-feminism, so too does her claim that Bella 'is a character in a story, nothing more or less.' This claim, which relies on the common misconception that fiction and narratives are 'mere entertainment' which don't affect life in the real world, is one students are all too conversant with. In fact, when they enter the classroom, they often presume we will be studying the texts as 'fans' rather than as feminist critics. However, by semester's end, if I have done my job, they recognize that nothing is ever 'just entertainment' and, more specifically, that those texts that capture the public imagination demand close scrutiny. Hopefully, they also begin to consider how comments such as those above promote facile, misleading notions about feminism (as if Bella's choice to be a young vampire wife is real feminism!) and can see Meyer's work as part and parcel of the post-feminist move to make feminism seem unnecessary.

Over the course of the semester, by analysing how the post-feminist paradigm encourages young women to make certain choices—to remain abstinent until marriage, to prioritize family and children, to beautify their bodies—students gain an awareness of the lack of real choice in women's lives—that while it may seem Bella (and her devoted readers) are free to choose, they are really only free to choose from a limited array of options if they want to remain viable subjects, good citizens, and good girls. Choice in this context has a profoundly regulatory dimension—choose wrong and you will court all sorts of danger—as in *Twilight*, when wrong choices lead to rape, abuse, infertility, and death).

During our discussions, I also encourage students to recognize that they can be 'fans' AND 'critical readers,'—that they can choose to enjoy the *Saga* while simultaneously examining (and resisting) its' more delimiting messages. We need not deny the pleasure of these texts, I tell them; rather, we can be active, engaged textual consumers, forging new, post-*Twilight* identities that may or may not accord with the choices made by any of the characters that populate Meyer's *Saga*.

From a textual analysis perspective, as the *Twilight* texts are far from difficult, students are able to readily critique what identities *Twilight* offers, and consider what visions of the world it promotes—and, more crucially, their ability to do so promotes analysis that goes beyond *Twilight*—beyond asking whether Edward is an abusive boyfriend or Bella is merely a damsel in distress, to a consideration of how gender is socially constructed in delimiting ways in the world at large. In addition to allowing for fruitful interrogation of gender norms and the sexual violence that is both a symptom and consequence of such norms, *Twilight* also offers fertile ground through which to examine romance and fairy tale narratives, norms of sexuality, white privilege, consumer capitalism and class, beauty imperatives, feminist backlash, and the

important role popular media texts play in shaping all of these factors. In short, engaging with the texts on an academic level can promote exploration of the less sparkly aspects not only of *The Twilight Saga*, but also of its cultural milieu.

Does *The Twilight Saga* depart from stereotypical representations of females as weaker or less important? Does it champion strong independent females? Is Bella's character too passive and too self-effacing to be a strong role model? Do female fans identify with the Saga's female characters in self-empowering ways or only in order to vicariously desire the strong males the series sets up as necessary to female happiness? Finally, does the infamous feminist condemnation of the series have it right? These are a mere sampling of feminist questions one can ask of the Saga. In keeping with the Women's Studies tenet that there is no absolute truth, the fact these questions don't have definitive answers serves to prompt students to realize that the answers to such questions are subjective and based on one's life experiences, political leanings, and so on. As students come to realize, however one answers such questions, one thing is sure: the series and reactions to it offer a fascinating testament to our cultural ambivalence about females and femininity.

On the one hand, as the females in the series are interesting, smart, brave, and multi-dimensional. On the other, they are valued for their beauty, mothering capabilities, and fashion know-how. Students, even those that come into the course as hard-core fans (or *Twi-hards*), quickly begin to notice such gendered representations, condemning, in particular, that the females in the Saga do not reject the notion that women should primarily focus on men, love, marriage and motherhood. As college students, such topics surely hits close to home for many of them—as does Bella's decision to give up college for life with Edward. Indeed, the fact that females in the series are rewarded for sticking to gender norms and punished for departing from them rankles students more and more as the semester continues. While many come into the course citing Bella and Alice as favourites, later in the semester many begin to defend Rosalie and Leah, questioning their representation as motherless bitches. Further, while most students declare they are 'Team Edward' or 'Team Jacob' at the outset of the course, by semester's end, even if they still hold a candle for one of the male leads, they also tend to condemn the textual upholding of a strict gender binary wherein the role of hero is reserved for males. While some students make convincing arguments that Bella is also a hero by Saga's end, such analysis nevertheless furthers the feminist aim of analysing gendered norms and expectations, and, crucially, does so in a way that promotes students to question 'received knowledge' and traditions. As we examine how masculinity is intricately bound up with patriarchy, heterosexuality, capitalism, and ideas of the nation-state, and is generally more strictly policed and guarded than femininity, students grasp gender as a constructed rather than 'real.' The Saga also offers valuable opportunities to interrogate how masculinity is coupled with violence—that part of being a 'real man' means being able to enact violence. Bella's relationships with both Edward and Jacob can be considered abusive, an 'aha moment' that invariably prompts students use to examine their own relationships specifically and the cultural romanticization of male violence more generally. Just as this failure to recognize male violence in the Saga can be usefully linked to the romanticization of violence in the culture at large, so to can the romance narrative that underpins, perpetuates, and even promotes such violence.

When we begin to consider the Saga in this vein, as a 'romance' or love story first and foremost, we contemplate the following questions: What does it mean that so many LOVE this tale of seduction that, as so many tales are, is riddled with domineering males, violence against women, and admonitions that female sexuality MUST be policed? Why and how are readers seduced to fall in love with the series and its male leads? Why does Bella's trajectory from teenage nobody to a gorgeous and powerful vampire heroine appeal to female readers in particular and how does it relate to the fact females are schooled to doubt themselves, to hate

their bodies, and to believe that only males can be heroes? What do Bella's 'blankness' and 'Mary Sue' attributes convey about the female role in romance narratives? What romantic tropes present in *Twilight* define the genre generally, and what does the popularity of the genre indicate? Are readers of such narratives, as scholar Janice Radway suggests, accomplices to our own subordination? Finally, does our love of this romantic, supernatural tale suggest that feminism indeed has it wrong—that all females really want is to be loved, to marry, to mother?

Discussing the Saga's links to the romance genre and to fairy tales, the course examines how *Twilight* tells the same story females have been told for centuries—that someday our prince will come, and, when he does, all our dreams will come true. Taking into account feminist analysis of such genres, we contemplate how *Twilight* contributes to a long history of texts coded as female or feminine (and thus unworthy of academic study). As the work of formative scholars such as Janice Radway and Tania Modleski established, romance narratives condition females to actively pursue the very types of relationships that have resulted in their social and cultural subordination. Yet, at the same time, the need to read such texts affirms patriarchy is not a desirable social model but, rather, one that women want to escape. Alas, romance does not offer escape so much as it immerses readers into a world which is in fact very much like the real one in which they reside—in which men have more power, wealth, and are often violent. By studying the Saga in relation to romance as a genre, students are able to go beyond the 'happy ending' the series promotes to examine how the unequal power dynamic in Bella's relations with Edward and Jacob echoes the inequality—and the violence—not only in the genre generally, but in real life female/male relations. Such analysis exemplifies the efficacy of the foundational feminist saying 'the personal is political,' illustrating that what goes on within one's romantic relationships (or romantic fantasies) is very much related to social norms relating to gender, race, class, sexuality and so on.

As a class, we also discuss how romance narratives promote women to partake in a narrative that is universally accepted for them—that of 'true love' leading to marriage and family. With this in mind, students are able to question whether females are in love with love not because it's wired into their DNA, but because it is the one path to happiness they are universally encouraged to follow. But, what if they were encouraged to follow other paths? What if Bella's story revolved around adventure and heroism (and college aspirations!) rather than love, marriage, and motherhood? Would it be as popular? And how does such a narrative ultimately present patriarchy as benign—as a social system that allows someone like Bella to triumph? Does the Saga offer us the chance to partake in what Radway argues is one of the primary pleasure of romance reading—the re-evaluation of femininity and the rewriting of traditional female identity? Via such questions, students are asked to metaphorically re-write parts of the narrative and re-evaluate the female characters. Their re-envisioning invariably results in a much stronger, more complex Bella. Additionally, students often come to the realization that the males of the Saga also need to be re-envisioned. This awareness links to the feminist notion of gender not as a binding dichotomy or biological given, but as something that is constructed in such a way that female is the 'opposite' and 'lesser' to male. For the category of female to change, so to must the category male. Such an analysis lays the foundation for a similar consideration of sexuality—another socially constructed category intricately tied to gender norms and dictates.

Contemplating how vampirism has often been deployed as a metaphor for sexuality, the course reflects on the penetrating, phallic bite of the vampire in relation to norms of sexuality, considering issues such as heteronormativity, male sexual aggression, female submissiveness, and supposed sexual deviancy. As students are quick to point out, Bella is rescued by a new form of vampire, a virginal vampire touting abstinence as the best policy. Students also note that sex in the Saga is surrounded by contradictions—it's sinful but joyful, dangerous but

desirable, risky but life-affirming. Examining how these contradictory messages in the Saga echo the contradictory messages we are given about sexuality—be abstinent but by hyper-sexual—we discuss the rampant fetishization of sex in contemporary culture and the concordant cult of virginity wherein the onus of virginity is placed squarely on female shoulders. In *Twilight*, this is reflected in the fact that Bella's virginity is the grail the texts simultaneously protects and fetishizes. When girls like Bella do have desire, it tends to be framed as monstrous and dangerous; Bella will quite literally die if she has sex with Edward before she is a vampire—a depiction that equates pre-vampire sex to pre-marital sex, eliding the real danger of the first (sex with a vampire) with the false danger touted in relation to the second (sex before marriage). At the same time, the text is dripping with sexual tension and desire, a factor that echoes the fact that females are often given abstinence only education by day and bombarded with hyper-sexualized imagery via popular culture at night. Analysing how this contradictory 'abstinence porn' message reverberates throughout cultural texts, students are encouraged to rethink their attitudes about sexuality, and particularly the policing of female sexuality.⁶

While students are quick to recognize the validity of analysing the Saga's representations of gender and sexuality, they tend to be more reluctant when asked to examine race and white privilege. Using Peggy McIntosh's influential white privilege list as a starting point, we begin to 'unpack' representations of race in the Saga, noting how these representation echo race relations in the real world. Focusing on the white privilege of the Cullens, the disenfranchisement of the Quileute, and the accompanying representation of Edward as the white male hero and Jacob as the dangerous wolf-of-colour, I prompt students to realize that to ignore race in the Saga is a glaring omission. Citing Richard Dyer's claim that race is never NOT a factor, but that racism is a 'non-consciousness that we all inhabit' I ask students if *Twilight* encourages readers to 'inhabit' this 'non-consciousness.'⁷ Further, I prompt them to consider how and why the Saga frames white vampires as the saviours and, more generally, whiteness as ideal. In relation to these racialized representations, we begin to consider issues pertaining to how white privilege links to class privilege and the general cultural glorification of wealth. This leads into an examination of how the *Twilight* phenomenon speaks to capitalism with its emphasis on consumerism—how, students are encouraged to contemplate—does 'buying into' *Twilight* promote consumer capitalism. This discussion of how *Twilight* reflects contemporary American desires for wealth and unfettered consumption promotes a consideration of the Cullen's excessive wealth (not to mention their gas guzzling ways and indiscriminate deer, lion, and bear consumption) and how their wealth comes at the expense of other people as well as the environment. As students point out, the desire for riches that the text glorifies, most pervasively through Bella's rise from working-class nobody to vampire heiress, validates the widespread cultural message that the car one drives, the house one owns, the products one buys demonstrate one's worth. Students thus grasp that *Twilight* substantiates messages make consumer culture thrive. They also recognize how such messages link to the cultural obsession with youth and beauty, noting how the series affirms such obsessions by presenting immortal youth as desirable, beauty as of tantamount importance, and the thin, chiselled, impervious body as ideal.

After considering gender, sexuality and romance, as well as race, class and beauty imperatives, we move onto an examination of the fandom and the gendered backlash it has received. Noting the cultural studies premise that all popular cultural forms are worthy of academic study, I ask students to consider why those forms that are either produced or consumed mainly by women are still often derided. We discuss the gendered dynamics of such derision, assessing why the books were widely panned and *Twilighters* were derided as silly girls. Exploring how women have long been positioned as avid consumers of mass culture that lack 'taste,' we consider how *Twilight* serves as testament to Andreas Huyssen's claim that 'the

fear of the masses ...is always also a fear of the woman,' and how the 'universalizing ascription of femininity to mass culture always depended on the very real exclusion of women from high culture and its institutions.'⁸ Asking students to assess whether this exclusion still holds true prompts many useful accounts of how and why females are excluded in various bastions of 'high culture.' Why, students ask, are texts and activities coded as masculine more 'worthy' of study? Why is it ok to be a 'Trekkie' or Star Wars fanatic, but 'silly' and 'stupid' to be a fan of *Twilight*? Such questions lead to an evaluation of why the *Twilight* phenomenon has been gendered feminine, a designation that has resulted in virulent, misogynistic reactions.

As with studies that suggest fan culture can be empowering and gender subversive, our classroom analysis of *Twilight* then moves on to examine how Twi-fans (and the students themselves) are not merely passive consumers or dupes, but active, engaged producers of culture. Crucially, such analysis positions students as important cultural players and, in keeping with the pedagogical aims of Women's Studies as a discipline, decentralizes both the professor and the texts in order to make student examination and exploration central. At the culmination of the term, the final project provides an opportunity for students to take what they have learned about feminist analysis and utilize it in a way that goes beyond not only *Twilight*, but beyond the classroom. Asked to produce an original contribution to feminist scholarship that incorporates analysis of the Saga with real world realities, student's final projects are as varied and expansive as is the discipline of Women's Studies itself. Some start blogs, some film parodies, some create anti-violence pamphlets, some create lesson plans to utilize in their future careers as educators. The list goes on.

By the end of the semester, students have not only analysed *Twilight* in relation to its messages about gender, sexuality, race, class, belief and so on, they have also analysed these issues in relation to what the popularity of the series reflects from a socio-cultural perspective. As they forge new ways to respond to the zeitgeist that promote analysis and critical discussion, they are anything but 'silly fans' or 'passive dupes'. Questioning their own and others attraction to the seductive messages *Twilight* offers, they leave the course better equipped to turn a critical eye towards popular culture generally and with a better understanding of why it so crucially important to interrogate the messages therein. As such, the course furthers feminist aims, not only by introducing students to key areas of feminist concern, but also by giving them a feminist lens through which to analyse the world, and, in some cases, become dedicated to changing it. Using *Twilight* as a 'gateway drug' to feminism may be detestable to some, but, from my perspective, getting students hooked on feminism is the goal and, if *Twilight* is the means, well, bring on the sparkly vampires.

Notes

¹ Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 2.

² McRobbie, Angela. 'Post-Feminism and Popular Culture,' *Feminist Media Studies* 4:3 (2004): 259.

³ Linda Hershman, 'Crazy Choices: Why on Earth do Women Stay in Abusive Relationships?' <http://www.slate.com/id/2215693>.

⁴ Elizabeth A. Pritchard, 'Speaking Out: Faith-Based Patriarchy and the Rhetoric of "Choice",' *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 19.1 (2003): 65-70.

⁵ *The Official Website of Stephenie Meyer*, http://www.stepheniemeyer.com/bd_faq.html

⁶ Christine Siefert, 'Bite Me! Or Don't,' *Bitch Magazine*, 2008, 12.

⁷ Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997), 7.

⁸ Andreas Huyssen, 'Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other,' January 15, 1986. <http://www.mariabuszek.com/kcai/PoMoSeminar/Readings/HuyssenMassCult.pdf>.

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‘I Was With Edward in My Happy Place:’¹ The Romance of The Twilight Saga as an Aca-Fan

Amanda Firestone

Abstract

This article considers my identity as an Aca-fan—my dual positionality as a *Twilight* fan and as a feminist scholar. I briefly explore the ways that my fandom informs and shapes my research in the fields of Communication and Critical Cultural Studies, as well as my classroom pedagogy style that relies heavily on popular culture to explain concepts, theories, and scholarship in a more tangible way. More specifically, I discuss how *Twilight* aids me in teaching concepts about romance and gendered relationships. As an Aca-fan, I have a tremendous stake in teaching and researching the Saga as I have an acute personal investment in the text. Sharing my fandom with my students opens me up for both critique and community in the classroom.

Key Words: Aca-fan, *Twilight*, romance, pedagogy, teaching.

1. Owning Fandom

My name is Amanda Firestone, and I am a *Twilight* fan. A Twilighter. A Cullenist. A Twi-hard. As such, I belong to a fandom that by reputation belongs to adolescent girls and middle-aged moms. In reality, the fandom is wide ranging in terms of membership, including people from diverse walks of life. As my friend and fellow fan, Tobey, once told me (at a *Twilight* DVD release party no less), ‘[this] is a love story, and anyone can enjoy a love story at any age, and I think that’s what the draw is.’² Many fans discover their niche within the fan collective and gravitate to those individuals with whom they feel an affinity or commonality. I am no exception, finding community with other women who share similar interests and life experiences beyond the Saga. I am a thirty year old woman, happily married (sans children, save my dog, Jack), and I live in the ‘burbs of a metropolitan American city. In addition to my *Twilight* fandom, I like lots of popular culture franchises, particularly *Dr. Who*, *Harry Potter*, the TV series *Bones*, and most things connected to the Whedon-verse.

Perhaps most importantly, I am also a feminist scholar. I have spent much of my adult life in higher education, learning the ins and outs of what it means to be a media consumer and the ways that media teaches people about gender and sexuality. More specifically, my feminist scholarship is focused through the lenses of Communication and Critical Cultural Studies. These disciplines insist that we explore those facets of life that are considered mundane or so ubiquitous as to escape our notice on a daily basis, the things that we are surrounded by yet never really *see*. It is with these thoughts in the back of my mind—that media is didactic and worth scrutiny—that I have constructed my classroom pedagogy style.

As time has gone on, I have come to understand that I am what Henry Jenkins has coined an Aca-fan. As Jenkins defines it, an Aca-fan is ‘a hybrid creature which is part fan and part academic.’³ Being an Aca-fan is about straddling the line between consuming media as an intellectual who is trained to recognize and deconstruct media in specific and sometimes brutal ways, while simultaneously consuming it as a ‘rogue reader,’ ‘to assert [one’s] own right to form interpretations, to offer evaluations, and to construct cultural canons’⁴ outside of those expected by dominant culture. Aca-fans experience tensions in their scholarship that other

researchers may not feel, because they have a significant investment in the text. Additionally, they sometimes encounter discouragement and discrimination because popular media is considered frivolous and fandom is not usually cast in positive light.

In his influential book, *Textual Poachers* (1992), Jenkins explains the difficulties fans experience with people who are outside of fandom and the solace gained from the fan community that grows around and between them. He says:

To speak as a fan is to accept what has been labeled [sic] a subordinated position within the cultural hierarchy, to accept an identity constantly belittled or criticized by institutional authorities. Yet it is also to speak from a position of collective identity, to forge an alliance with a community of others in defense [sic] of tastes which, as a result, cannot be read as totally aberrant or idiosyncratic.⁵

This particular passage speaks to me because I am invested in a fandom that appears to be constantly belittled. Again, since *Twilight* is pegged as something for adolescent girls or middle-aged moms, people tend to look at me quizzically when I *out* myself as a fan. 'You like that?' they ask. I can practically see the thoughts spinning through their heads as they try to reconcile what I have just revealed and what they know of me. This is particularly true when I do my introduction speech to new students for a class, which always includes a passionate avowal about owning feminism as a part of myself and insisting that every course I teach is feminist in some way or another. Somehow being a feminist and being a *Twilight* fan do not seem to readily fit together.

Yet, in my mind, as an Aca-fan, they are excellent bedfellows! I am a feminist. I am a *Twilight* fan, and the commingling of one identity and the other informs how I reflexively become more knowledgeable about those parts of myself. As human beings, we are complex creatures that appear to thrive on contradiction and inconsistency. *Twilight* plays to my fantasies, while my feminist heart implicitly understands that there are fundamental problems with this text that seem to exalt traditional gender roles where women defer to men's agencies at every turn. Anne Helen Peterson details these tensions in her article, 'That Teenage Feeling: *Twilight*, Fantasy, and Feminist Readers,' (2012) as she interviews women who, like herself, are both self-identified feminists and *Twilight* fans. Peterson eloquently sums some of my feelings about reconciling feminism and fandom when she says:

Whether in the form of good old fashioned consciousness raising, mentoring girls and teenagers, leading book groups, or teaching in the classroom, feminism needs voices—voices that do not decry or dismiss, but encourage thought, critique, and examination.⁶

The juxtaposition of identity as scholar and fan is a key component of my classroom pedagogy style, my tactics and strategies that allow me to form 'social relationships'⁷ with my students. I do my best to foster an open learning environment that praises their knowledge of media and popular culture yet pushes them to critically evaluate what they are consuming. There is something at stake for me when I share my fandom in the classroom—I expose part of my personal life that allows students to further judge and question me as an instructor. However, sharing my fandom also allows me to forge an instant connection with the students who also identify as *Twilight* fans while challenging others who believe some of the negative stereotypes associated with the fan community and, more importantly, feminists. I continually remind my students that it is possible to recognize that the text a person takes pleasure, joy, and/or comfort

from is also fraught with problems in terms of its potential subtextual messages as they are represented by characters, plots, dialogue, and other literary devices.

2. Teaching Romance

At the University of South Florida, I teach a course called Women and Communication. As a part of the course, I've built in a week's worth of readings, lectures, and media examples that centre on women's experiences with fairy tales and romance texts like novels, films, and television shows. Why? Because, in my mind, the human experience is fundamentally about relationships, and more particularly, our Western cultural discourses about romantic love provide clear guidelines about the gendered roles within relationships. For many of my students, this is the first time they have stopped to consider what classic fairy tales, like *Sleeping Beauty*, and romance novels, like *Twilight*, are telling them in terms of representations of love and gendered behaviour.

Before the class can begin the work of textual analysis on our 'artefacts' (the 1959 animated version of *Sleeping Beauty* and Catherine Hardwicke's 2008 filmic adaptation of *Twilight*), we begin with readings that examine 'romance' as a cultural construct and as a genre of literature. The first article I like my students to read is Emily Martin's 'The Egg and the Sperm: How Science Has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male-Female Roles' (1991). I have two reasons for using this as the introductory article. First, it nicely bridges to the previous week's conversations concerning sexuality. This article allows me to jog their memories about things we have talked about in the recent past while it also asks them to make 'Ah-Ha!' connections to the new material. Second, Martin's piece explicitly connects the scientific language used to describe human sexual reproduction, which we assume to be objective and non-bias, and the classic romantic fairy tale that posits a male hero as an active agent seeking a female heroine who is passively waiting to be saved or claimed.

Martin's research affirms that female anatomy (uterus, ovaries, ova, etc.) and bodily processes (oogenesis and menstruation) are bound to gendered language. At every turn, Martin finds that anatomy and biology 'texts have an almost dogged insistence on casting female processes in a negative light.'⁸ Female bodies are constructed as passive—the egg itself is not mobile but reliant on other means to transport it through the fallopian tubes—and wasteful—a female body is born with all of her eggs; '[f]ar from being *produced*, as sperm are, they merely sit on the shelf, slowly degenerating and aging like overstocked inventory.'⁹ Conversely male bodies are cast as active, aggressive, and efficient. These stereotypical roles are further highlighted when Martin quotes authors Gerald Schatten and Helen Schatten, who make the specific analogy of the egg as 'a dormant bride awaiting her mate's magic kiss, which instills the spirit that brings her to life.'¹⁰ This is, of course, the major plot point of *Sleeping Beauty* where Princess Aurora slumbers in the castle tower awaiting true love's first kiss.

Now that the students have an idea about how gendered language associates men and women with very particular qualities—right down to the cellular level it seems—we shift gears to talk about popular constructions of romance through romance novels. For many authors, the romance genre fundamentally recapitulates and reinforces representations of women 'in male-dominated heterosexual couples.'¹¹ While this may be true, Janice Radway's 'Women Read the Romance: The Interaction of Text and Context' (1983) is my go-to article to talk about how it is necessary to include readers' perspectives in research. Radway claims that scholarship which ignores readers is short-sighted, as it 'fail[s] to detect the ways in which [reading romance] may serve positive functions even as the novels celebrate patriarchal institutions.'¹² Additionally, previous research which interprets romance as an *oppressive* genre removes readers' agency and disregards changing trends within the genre to reflect more current approaches to gender

and relationships.¹³ Effectively, previous research has marked romance readers as gullible individuals who not-so-secretly want to be dominated.

Radway's article was groundbreaking in 1983, though today her arguments seem a no-brainer to many of my students. They don't like the idea that their reading (and media) selections might cause other people to make unfounded assumptions. I'm inclined to agree with them, understanding that fans are especially critical of the texts in which they are invested. Contextually, Radway's work is now thirty years old, and her conclusions about women using romance novels as a mild form of protest and escapism from the duties of daily (domestic) life feel out of touch. Or do they? I ask my students to watch both *Sleeping Beauty* and *Twilight* for this week's classes because in many ways they're the same movie.

So, it is with this in mind that I introduce our textual analysis exercise. For me, this is an exciting part of the course. We've spent much time talking about how we are constantly interpreting the things we come into contact with, now we *finally* have a chance to see this interpretation-thing in action. For those who align themselves as anti-fans or the generally disinterested, there's a sense of delight knowing that I will mercilessly pick apart the details of a scene or two from *Twilight*. For the fellow fans, discomfort and uncertainty are the prevalent emotions. 'Why are you doing this?' they ask. In fact, I've had several students ask me not to proceed with the analysis because they were concerned they could never watch the movie again and feel the same pleasure. Their concerns are valid, because there's a good chance that they won't see the movie the same way again.

I do what I can to quell their anxiety and fears, explaining that I'm not specifically seeking to point out only negative things in the text. As Jenkins concludes: 'fan critical practice may provide a model for a more specifically drawn, more exploratory style of media criticism: one alive to the pleasures of the text but retaining some critical distance to its ideological structures.'¹⁴ I remind them that they are also free to interpret the text at will. Sneakily, I am encouraging them to become 'rogue readers,'¹⁵ considering the scenes from these movies using their own perspectives. For the fans in the classroom, I reassure them that they do not have to agree with me; it's ok for them to continue to focus on the romance between Bella and Edward, so long as they take a moment to consider that there are other possibilities.

I focus my analysis on similar scenes from the films where the would-be lovers meet in the forest for the first time. In *Sleeping Beauty*, Princess Aurora is comically led to Prince Phillip through the antics of her trickster woodland friends, particularly an owl and squirrel. Up to the moment Phillip steps in to dance with the unsuspecting woman, she's been waxing poetic about the man of her dreams. (As an aside, I find this suspicious as she's been living with three women since she was an infant and ostensibly has never seen another person in her short life.) Through an eloquently performed 'go away, come back' Do Sa Do, Aurora and Phillip quickly recognize each other as soul mates. For Bella and Edward, the conclusion is the same though the steps to get there are a bit different. Bella wordlessly communicates that Edward should follow her into the forest. Here, it is she who reveals his true nature by voicing the fact that he is a vampire. Rather than running away, it is Bella who pursues Edward, despite the fact that he's using every scare-tactic at his disposal to change her mind. Edward eventually acquiesces, famously saying, 'so the lion fell in love with the lamb,'¹⁶ invoking biblical covenant that their impossible relationship is potentially sanctioned by a higher power.

There is always a lively discussion post analysis. After drawing clear comparisons between these films, the students generally agree that the 'messages' are fundamentally the same although the packaging has changed: women are incomplete without a 'soul mate;' once found, they are willing to go to extraordinary and extreme lengths to maintain that relationship, even in the face of their own peril. In terms of *Twilight*, many of the students are surprised that I interpret Bella in some scenes as strong and in charge of the interactions she has with Edward.¹⁷

They are not surprised that I interpret Edward as displaying behaviours that are common for abusers, like purposefully destroying objects—in his case a tree—in order to intimidate and control another person. The conversation fluxes back and forth from the text to the readers and potential subtextual messages that are embedded there. And now we've reached the slippery slope of media effect.

From this point on, there are more questions than answers, and none of the answers we come up with satisfy us. The students seem collectively worried that Western culture popularizes texts like *Twilight* and maintains popularity for those like *Sleeping Beauty* which appear to reinforce and reify gender roles that are not based on ideals like mutual respect, equality, and positive self-confidence. 'How can people like this when it has so many problems?' All of the eyes land on me. They're not asking this question to Amanda the instructor, but Amanda the fan.

3. Reflection and Reconciliation

The implied question is: 'Why do you like this?' It is difficult to articulate a clear answer, and believe me, it's a question I've asked myself often. I encountered the series by chance in a Waterstone's in Gatwick Airport and picked up *Twilight* as a light, 'trash novel' for my flight. The shop assistant told me (warned me?) that I would love it. Seven hours later I touched down and immediately went in search of *New Moon*. From the earliest chapters, I was completely drawn into the story's diegesis. It was so easy for me to slip into Bella and her experiences. While her characterization may be painted with broad strokes, her position as the 'every-girl' speaks to me. I also grew up in a small town, and her feelings of isolation from the bigger world, the discomfort of her classmates' scrutiny, and the power of her first romantic and sexual attraction were familiar to me in ways I rarely encountered in fiction. While I love *Pride and Prejudice*, Lizzie Bennet's Regency era England is a foreign time and place to me.

Reading The Twilight Saga gives me direct access to 'my happy place.' While I'm researching, I frequently scan the text for quotes or page numbers. Without fail, I end up reading multiple pages or chapters, because it's a world that I know so well. The characters have become old friends to me, and I happily anticipate Emmett's jokes, Jasper's stoicism, and Alice's pixie energy. And, I experience all of that through Bella; we merge and fuse into a unique *being*. The longing and desire she feels for Edward is a reflection, an echo, of some of my emotions accumulated over my short lifetime. It is difficult to put into words the kind of magic that happens when I read those words, the psychic transportation that happens as I slip into Meyer's supernatural world like my favourite thrift store sweater.

For my students who are also *Twilight* fans, we have this in common. They understand what it means to know these characters and stories as well as their own memories. When conversations begin in the classroom about how our individual fan identities shape our lives, other students begin to chime in with the things they like. Movies, video games, musicians, sports. The classroom is suddenly filled with diverse tastes and appreciations for the *stuff* our culture is made of. We used *Twilight* and romance as a jumping point, and now we're in a conversation about how we make friends, build community, understand ourselves and others. I agree with Peterson that The Twilight Saga holds the potential for a 'teaching moment.'¹⁸

Largely written off as a cheesy 'tween romance novel, *Twilight* gives us the opportunity to engage with ideas about romance, gender roles, fan practices, and many more concepts that are useful for digging deeper into the fundamental structures that invisibly shape our lives. Call it what you will—media literacy, critical engagement, consciousness raising—my job is about providing students with tools that allow them to look below the surface of culture to find the hidden meanings, motivations, and interpretations that reside there. As an Aca-fan, I'm in a unique position to deliver this to my students; I get to make community with younger, fellow

fans while challenging the assumptions of others who don't claim that fandom, and all while enjoying the pleasure of 'my happy place.' What could be better?

Notes

- ¹ Stephenie Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2008), 22.
- ² Tobey Mahoney (friend and founding member of The *Twilight* Sisters fan club), interviewed by Amanda Firestone, March 22, 2009. Conducted at Barnes and Noble Booksellers: Carrollwood, FL.
- ³ Henry Jenkins, 'Confessions of an Aca-Fan: The Official Weblog of Henry Jenkins' last modified 2010, Viewed June 10, 2012, <http://henryjenkins.org/aboutme.html>.
- ⁴ Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 18.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.
- ⁶ Anne Helen Peterson, 'That Teenage Feeling: *Twilight*, Fantasy and Feminist Readers,' *Feminist Media Studies* 12.1 (2012): 65, accessed June 5, 2012, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2011.558348>.
- ⁷ David Buckingham, 'Introduction: Fantasies of Empowerment? Radical Pedagogy and Popular Culture,' in *Teaching Popular Culture: Beyond Radical Pedagogy*, ed. David (Buckingham, London: UCL Press, 1998), 3, accessed June 6, 2012, <http://www.usf.eblib.com/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=178280>.
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- ¹³ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁴ Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 291.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.
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- ¹⁷ Amanda Firestone, 'Apples to Oranges: The Heroines of *Twilight* and *The Hunger Games*', in *Of Bread, Blood, and The Hunger Games: Critical Essays on the Suzanne Collins Trilogy*, ed. Mary F. Pharr and Leisa A. Clark (Jefferson: McFarland, 2012), 209-18.
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Trading in Tights for Bites: Vampire as Superhero in The Twilight Saga

Laura Purdy

Abstract

Before The Twilight Saga phenomenon, fans of the paranormal had a fairly fixed notion of what a vampire was: demonic, dangerous and most definitely villainous. However, in The Twilight Saga, Edward Cullen is presented as a vampire, who protects his loved ones from evil. He is not a monster like other vampires, nor fully human like the community that he imitates—but, as I argue, superhuman. In fact, Edward becomes the moral centre of the saga, as he abstains from both sexual and vampiric penetration before marriage. In comparison to the other lacklustre individuals of Forks, Edward's superior morality, physicality and even culture, raises the status of the vampire from subhuman to superhuman, and consequently his role from villain to superhero. Comic superheroes such as Spiderman, Batman and Superman, are comparable to Edward's character, particularly when love interest Bella claims 'I had been vacillating during the last month between Bruce Wayne and Peter Parker'. Even when Edward attempts to tell Bella that he could be the 'bad guy' she refuses to believe that he will harm her.¹ Along with various indicators throughout the text, Bella's perspective aligns a romanticised image of Edward with the figure of the hero as opposed to the villain. With the bodily transformation and teenage angst of Spiderman, the speed, strength and the inhuman quality of Superman, as well as the high culture interests, wealth and status of Batman, Edward's superhuman status can be read as an appropriation of iconic superheroes. Recently adapted to a graphic novel, it becomes apparent that The Twilight Saga has shifted and shaped the mythology of the vampire, transforming Edward and the rest of his family from villains to superheroes.

Key Words: Twilight Saga, vampire, superhero, human, Edward Cullen, *The Short Second Life of Bree Tanner*, *Midnight Sun*.

There are good guys, there are bad guys, and then there are the rest of us. Literature often portrays specific roles that help the reader to determine whether one is supposed to sympathize with a character, or whether one is to fear them. This is made clear to the reader through the eyes of one character's perspective, as well as semiotic clues indicating that character's particular role within the story. However, what happens when these roles are not so clear? This paper examines how Edward Cullen's character, from The Twilight Saga, challenges the imagined good vs. evil binary that is often typical of classic literatures. These identities are referred to as narrative archetypes. These are constructed often to perpetuate specific hierarchical ideologies. According to Northrop Frye, an archetype is 'a recurrent image... a symbol which connects one poem with another and thereby helps to unify and integrate our literary experience'.² These archetypes do not typically exist simultaneously. If they did, a complex character would be formed, and consequently, the moral of the narrative may not be so obvious. This simultaneous existence of multiple archetypes, I would argue, is exactly what Edward Cullen portrays for the readers of The Twilight Saga. He provides them with a new type of 'super-hero', who is as complex as the readers that are swooning over him.

Through an examination of the complexity of Edward Cullen, the roles of the superhero, human, as well as vampire, all exist, in some way, within his character—ultimately leading the reader to experience the 'super-hero'. This 'super-hero' breaks away from simplistic

characterization by encompassing multiple qualities which are typically contradictory. This type of complexity is more clearly analysed in this paper through a continuum, which ranges from non-human (vampire) to human to superhuman (superhero). From the villainous nature and biological make-up of the vampire to the morality of a human and the capabilities of a superhero, an examination of the qualities of these three major positions (vampire, human, superhero) on this continuum may help to delve into this new type of 'super-hero'.

1. Edward as Vampire

In her book, *Vampire as Numinous Experience*, Beth McDonald explores what makes a figure vampiric. McDonald carefully selects three texts, each stemming from the closing years of the past three centuries, to outline the 'negative numinous', or the evil yet sublime quality of the vampire.³ McDonald examines Samuel Coleridge's 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner' (1798), Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), and ultimately Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* (1976-1995). With these texts, McDonald establishes a historical chronology of gothic literatures featuring the figure of the vampire. Beyond this, McDonald's study brings to light a number of threads that run through each of the selected works. One of which is that 'vampires' consume human blood, which results in the death of a human for the vampire's own survival. In contrast with the first book in the series is the unpublished manuscript *Midnight Sun*,⁴ in which the events from *Twilight* are told from Edward's perspective. In *Midnight Sun*, Edward Cullen quickly reveals that his monstrous nature cannot be ignored as he attempts to deal with his desire for Bella's blood. He admits that he had not always been a 'vegetarian' vampire, stating 'I had fed on human blood,' although only on those who, in his opinion, deserved to die.⁵ Edward is still unable to forgive himself after years of abstaining from what he, as a vampire, was meant to eat.

Another quality of the vampire is the 'negative numinous'.⁶ Following Rudolph Otto's notion of the numinous as a 'wholly other', 'divine' and as a 'feeling which remains where the concept fails', McDonald explains the 'negative numinous' as the numinous in which the 'demonic element is emphasized' rather than the holy.⁷ In other words, the 'negative numinous' is an evil yet enticing force or being. Focussing specifically on vampires, McDonald's definition is integral to the understanding of the sublime spirit of the vampire a feeling consistent not only in the specific vampire works previously listed by McDonald, but also in *The Twilight Saga*. Edward's ability to attract girls is not attributed strictly to his looks, but to an unspeakable energy that attracts people. In *Twilight*, Bella explains Edward's ability to 'dazzle' people, claiming that '[i]t is hardly fair'.⁸ She continues by declaring that, '[y]ou have to know the effect you have on people';⁹ however Edward reveals in *Midnight Sun* that he was actually attempting to frighten the waitress, unaware of his power to 'dazzle'.¹⁰ This example of negative numinosity demonstrates Edward's vampiric ability to seduce, even if he does not plan to kill.

Human blood sucking and negative numinosity are two primary qualities that define vampirism according to McDonald, and even though Edward no longer drinks the blood of humans, he still views himself as monstrous. It is made clear to the readers early in the first book of the Saga, *Twilight*, that Edward is a vampire or a 'cold one'.¹¹ According to Edward, this makes him dangerous or 'a monster', not to mention referring to the rest of the vampires being 'supernaturally strong and fast, killing machines by nature...',¹² himself included. Although Edward does not seem to adhere to the characteristics of traditional vampire mythology, since his sharpened teeth have replaced the traditional fangs and he sparkles instead of burning in the sun—yet he still views himself as a soulless vampire. Although Bella is the primary voice of the Saga, the narration from Bree, Edward and Jacob provides the reader with valuable new perspectives. In *Midnight Sun*, the reader hears Edward's uncensored, and, at times, horrifying thoughts. Passages such as this one provide insight into the monster that lies

within Edward: a monster that he is constantly at odds with, both ethically and morally. In one particular scene, Edward imagines precisely how he would kill Bella and the rest of his classmates followed by his clean escape. He reveals:

[t]he face of the monster in the mirror mocked me. Even as a part of me shuddered away from the monster, another part was planning it. If I killed the girl first, I would have only fifteen or twenty seconds with her before the humans in the room would react.¹³

As innocent as Edward may appear through Bella's narration in *Twilight*, the introduction of *Midnight Sun* presents a much darker image of Edward Cullen. Through his own eyes, Edward sees himself as nothing but a monster.

According to Roland Barthes in *Mythologies*, a myth is a culmination of signs, which over time transform 'history into nature'.¹⁴ In his essay on 'The World of Wrestling', Barthes introduces the notion of hero versus villain. Although the novel is not a performance like wrestling, the signs displayed are equally as important in the development of the characters within a text. Barthes describes how the wrestler, like *commedia dell'arte* actors, 'who display in advance, in their costumes and attitudes, the future content of their parts' use semiotic codes to reveal their role within the fiction.¹⁵ This is also true of traditional vampire fiction; evil glares, black capes, ancient garb, and pale faces. In the case of The Twilight Saga, these signs represent not the Cullens, but instead the ancient Volturi, who serve as a reminder to the reader of how Edward and the other vegetarian vampires are made to function. They are, moreover, a reminder of the potential killers that they all have the capacity to become. The Volturi represent the traditional evil that vampires are known for, an evil that Edward reveals in *Midnight Sun* is still inside of him.

However, one cannot ignore that Edward, in many ways, digresses from the traditional vampire. Bella questions Edward's non-traditional role as vampire when she asks '[d]on't laugh—but how can you come out during the daytime? He laughed anyway. 'Myth.'¹⁶ 'Burned by the sun?' 'Myth.' 'Sleeping in coffins?' 'Myth.'¹⁷ Traditionally, fans of the paranormal have had a fixed notion of what a vampire should be; demonic, dangerous and most certainly villainous.¹⁸ In reality, however, the image of the vampire has mutated because of social and cultural developments. This mutation has given way to an influx of popular and contemporary vampires that have bombarded novels, television and film for the last thirty years. This relatively recent trend in vampire fiction follows the late 20th century popularity of Anne Rice's character, Lestat from *The Vampire Chronicles*. Lestat attempts to come to terms with his newfound vampirism throughout the series, allowing readers to witness a humanized vampire, haunted by his lack of a soul. This trend of mournful vampires suffering for their sins, conscious of their immorality, has taken new ground with the recent surge of human-like vampires. What may be referred to as 'the vampire next door' fiction has surged in popularity, including television vampire heroes such as Bill Compton from *True Blood* (2008-present) and Stefan Salvatore from *The Vampire Diaries* (2009-present). Both of these vampire heroes attempt to become a part of the surrounding human world, thus relating to other 'human' characters on an emotional level. For instance, both lead vampires fall in love with a human woman and, ironically, attempt to protect that woman from the evils of the world. Even though Edward does not display all of the typical vampiric signs, he is following the trajectory of popular vampire fiction, with a few minor tweaks (like sparkling).

2. Edward as Human

Edward, in opposition to the traditional demonic vampires such as Dracula, is barely distinguishable from the humans amongst whom he and his family live. A literary progression of the vampire from evil to human-like, allows for a complex vampire such as Edward to exist. This evolution of vampire mythology explains how teenaged vampires are able to live in the simple town of Forks and attend high school without slaughtering their classmates. Because most vampires were once human themselves, it does not seem unlikely that they may be able to retain aspects of their humanity. An analysis of Edward's social behaviour, as opposed to his instinctual nature would suggest that not only does Edward act as a human, but through his moral agency, he becomes a representation of an ideal human teenager. Some examples of Edward's humanness include: he drives fast cars, woos a teenage girl and spends time with his 'family', as opposed to his coven. But to refine the specific criteria of this 'human' role, Edward's humanity is made apparent by his appearance, his attachment to human traditions, his moral agency, and his emotional demonstrations of love and anger. Through the eyes of different members of the community the Cullens are human, and even newborn vampires, such as Bree in the novella *The Short Life of Bree Tanner*, are shocked by the Cullens' abilities to show compassion and humanity.¹⁹

Although slightly suspicious, the Cullens' appearance is human enough to be able to attend school with students who have little reason to doubt their humanity, aside from their near perfection. With stylish hair and designer clothing, the idolized and god-like Cullens keep to their close-knit family while in the school cafeteria. However, this status does not prevent the other students from gossiping. School gossip Jessica tells Bella, '[t]hat's Edward. He's gorgeous of course, but don't waste your time. He doesn't date. Apparently none of the girls here are good-looking enough for him.'²⁰ Although perceived as odd, no one questions whether Edward or the rest Cullens are human.

Edward not only appears human, but shares his human values and a strong sense of morality with his family, who are idealized throughout the Saga for having high moral standards. In this case, their 'traditionalism' may be attributed to their age, since Edward is approximately 107 years old at the beginning of *Twilight*. This drastic difference in maturity is a stark contrast the rest of Edward's schoolmates. This 'traditionalism' is one of the main obstacles for Bella in her relationship with Edward, as he refuses to have sex with her until their wedding night. Although he explains that he will not sleep with her because he is afraid he will harm her when he gets too close, this explanation is cast aside as his true reason for abstinence is later revealed: Edward wants to wait until his honeymoon to lose *his* virginity. Before her wedding, all Bella could think about was how she 'wanted a *real* honeymoon with Edward' and 'despite the danger he feared this would put [Bella] in, he'd agreed to try.'²¹ This indicates that perhaps the real reason Edward had doubts about having sexual contact with Bella was not because she was human, but because of his old-fashioned values. Born in 1901, Edward holds virginity to a different standard than a modern teenager.²² His traditional perspective is not only concerning sexuality, but marriage in general: Bella's phobia towards marriage contrasts Edward's desire for that official title of 'husband'. This is another instance of Edward privileging human tradition, very much in opposition to the immorality plaguing 'traditional' vampirism. Typically vampires are not viewed as those that desire marriage, but instead desiring something else completely—human blood. Most importantly, Edward makes evident, time and time again, that he has chosen his morality over his carnal and vampiric desires. Edward's choice to abstain reveals that he has free will and is not bound by the restrictions of a conventional vampire. Edward, along with the rest of his family, is able to suppress his desire to drink the blood of humans, instead replacing the humans with the Cullens' version of 'vegetarianism'—preying only on large game animals.

Morality is also explored in the Saga with the introduction of the Volturi. This ancient vampire government represents the demonic, traditional type of vampire, so often represented in vampire fiction. Although the Volturi remind the readers of the capacity that the Cullen family have for evil, it is made clear that the vampires within the world of *The Twilight Saga* have the choice to abstain from the traditional vampiric activities. Consequently, the Cullen family is a prime example of the 'vampire as human' literary trend, which rejects the grand narrative that vampires are naturally evil. In contrast to the traditional vampire, the Cullens do not seem monstrous, but rather as a family attempting to blend into the human crowd. This 'vampire as human' fiction allows for a re-invention of the vampire figure that intrinsically challenges the narratives that masquerade as truths.

As is reinforced in *The Short Second Life of Bree Tanner*, compassion is not typically the first priority of the vampire race. It is not until the vampires in the novella have been relatively humanized that this type of human emotion is expressed. While Bree lives out her initial months as a newly transformed vampire in a house full of newborn vampires, she sees little love or weakness amidst the strong, gluttonous murderers. That is until she discovers a fellow vampire Diego, who shows her compassion and causes her to feel human emotions once again. She quickly refers to Diego as a 'person' and not a vampire.²³ When Bree finally meets the Cullens, she begins to become aware of the potential for vampires to possess compassion. Nevertheless, Bree does not live long enough to realize that living as a vampire would not necessarily sentence her immortal life to one filled with murder and emotional reclusion. In opposition to Bree, Edward is introduced post-murder spree and once he has become humanized. It is Edward's passion for Bella, while still maintaining his morality which reveals his humanity.

The most profound indicator of Edward's emotion is his ability to love and protect those he loves, even if it costs him his life. In *Midnight Sun* it is clear that Edward's life revolves around Bella. His version of *Twilight* begins almost immediately with discussions of the new girl Bella's 'pair of wide, chocolate-brown human eyes set in a pale heart-shaped face.'²⁴ Edward questions how Bella could 'not realize that she was the most beautiful... most exquisite... Those words weren't even enough.'²⁵ This type of praise only intensifies throughout the manuscript.

This same love, however, is what drives Edward's seemingly desperate attempts to protect Bella from harm. Part of being a human is revealing imperfection and although many unknowing citizens of Forks may not see it, Edward does have a weakness; Bella. Edward's struggle to protect, control and to keep Bella for himself are the driving force of Edward's every action. He is constantly promising to protect her, even attempting suicide in *New Moon* when he fears she is dead. Edward recites Romeo's words upon seeing the sleeping Juliet, '[d]eath, that hath sucked the honey of thy breath hath no power yet upon thy beauty.'²⁶ This intense and human love for Bella nearly caused Edward his immortal life.

The first chapter of both *Twilight* and *Midnight Sun* is entitled 'At First Sight' which indicates to the reader the romanticised notion of love that both Edward and Bella held. William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is an example of a repeated intertext running throughout *New Moon*. Edward and Bella both relate to the notion of the 'star cross'd lovers' as they are from different worlds.²⁷ Harold Bloom, Shakespearean scholar, has called Shakespeare the inventor of the human. Bloom explains that Shakespeare was able to encapsulate human emotion and personality within his characters who were, in Bloom's opinion, just as complex if not more so than as an actual human.²⁸ Meyer seems to connect this notion of the human to Bella and Edward, as the comparison to the classic play humanizes Edward by aligning him with the iconic Romeo. These two male characters—Edward and Romeo—express both love as well as vulnerability, 'She couldn't love me the way I loved her—such an overpowering, all-consuming, crushing love, would probably break her fragile body.'²⁹ Romeo finds himself

vulnerable because of his love for Juliet stating ‘O sweet Juliet,/ Thy beauty hath made me effeminate,/ And in my temper soften’d valour’s steel’³⁰ Like Romeo, Edward’s intense capacity for emotion, in this case vulnerability, is an integral aspect of their human-like characterization.

Edward’s ability to emote not only demonstrates humanness, but because of the over-romanticised nature of *The Twilight Saga* through the allusions to canonical works such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Wuthering Heights*, Edward becomes what Shakespearean scholars such as Northrop Frye referred to as the Comic Hero. Edward often mirrors the characters in these texts—his human emotions and self-sacrificing love for Bella are what make him an ideal candidate for this particular type of hero. Romance can be a part of both comedy and tragedy; however in *The Twilight Saga*, the happy ending follows the formula of a comedy, resulting in a wedding, child, and a happily ever after. Let us also recall that comedy, according to Frye, deals with the integration of the hero into society:

A young man wants a young woman, [...] his desire is resisted by some opposition, usually paternal, and that near the end of the play [narrative] some twist in the plot enables the hero to have his will.³¹

Because Edward respects his family’s affinity for monogamy, he is finally able to feel whole at the end of the *Saga* when Bella transforms and is able to love him for eternity. This struggle to fit into the traditional role as husband and father, as well as to belong within his family dynamic is finally achieved by Edward. The hero requires dramatic emotion as well as a desire for social acceptance, both of which are human attributes.

3. Edward as Superhero

Although Edward may appear human through the eyes of those around him, he is something different when viewed from Bella’s perspective. She contemplates:

Could the Cullens be vampires? Well they were something. Something outside the possibility of rational justification was taking place in front of my incredulous eyes. Whether it be Jacob’s cold ones or my own superhero theory, Edward Cullen was not... human.³²

In contrast to *Midnight Sun*, Bella’s perspective throughout *The Twilight Saga* frames Edward not as a villain, nor as a human, but as something much greater. She does not view him as a monstrous vampire. Although indicators are present, the question of who Edward really is arises near the beginning of the *Saga* when Bella and Edward discuss how she perceives him—when Edward asks Bella what she thinks he is, she responds with her thoughts of ‘radioactive spiders’.³³ The reader believes Bella, as she has given no indication that she is an unreliable narrator, even when Edward responds with ‘what if I’m the bad guy’.³⁴

This is an aspect of the *Saga* that is integral to the analysis of Edward’s character as superhero. Because the novels are mainly narrated from Bella’s perspective, she is guiding the reader’s interpretation of Edward. Once Bella learns that Edward is not human, she has difficulty recognizing him as a vampire, or non-human. Edward’s character develops through the clouded lens of Bella’s love for him, and since she narrates the story, this is the only version of Edward that the reader knows throughout *Twilight*. However, with the introduction of *Midnight Sun*, as well as Jacob’s version in *Breaking Dawn* alternate perspectives help to give a more complex sense of Edward’s character. The contrast of opinions between Bella and Jacob concerning Edward is obvious, yet Jacob is in love with Bella, so his impression of Edward as a

‘bloodsucker’ may appear as biased to the reader.³⁵ However, since Jacob’s perspective lasts for 215 pages of the total of the 754 pages in *Breaking Dawn*, the reader is bound to view Edward through Bella’s perspective instead; thus he becomes a superhero. Jacob’s perspective, as well as Edward’s own in *Midnight Sun*, reveals however, that Edward is seen as many things to many different characters.

Superheroes

If, as previously described, an evil glare, black cape, ancient garb, and a pale face represent what a vampire should be, then what is a superhero—an archetypal, generally male figure, donning tights and saving the world with a concern for social welfare? Edward is neither a monster like other traditional vampires, nor a human like the community that he imitates. In comparison to the other lacklustre citizens of Forks, Edward’s superior skill set raises the status of the vampire from non-human to superhuman, and consequently his role from villain to superhero. So how does one identify a superhero? Does it depend on the individual wearing tights and a cape? Is it the demonstration of seeking moral justice? Or is it the prototypical super powers that indicate when a character is indeed a superhero. In his book *Superhero: The Secret Origin of a Genre*, Peter Coogan gives his definition:

Su-per-he-ro (soo’per hîr’o) n., pl.—roes. A heroic character with a selfless, pro-social mission; with superpowers-extraordinary abilities, advanced technology, or highly developed physical, mental or mystical skills; who has a superhero identity embodied in a codename and iconic costume, which typically express his biography, character, powers, or origin (transformation from ordinary person to superhero); and who is generally distinct, i.e. can be distinguished from characters of related genres (fantasy, science fiction, detective, etc.) by a preponderance of generic conventions. Often superheroes have dual identities, the ordinary one of which is usually a closely guarded secret.—*superheroic*, *adj.* Also *super hero*, *super-hero*.³⁶

In The Twilight Saga superheroes, such as Spiderman, Batman and Superman, are compared to Edward’s character, particularly when Bella thinks ‘I had been vacillating during the last month between Bruce Wayne and Peter Parker.’³⁷ How does Edward stack up to the title of superhero? How does he compare to some of the most infamous superheroes?

Beginning with the American icon Superman, or as he is referred to in John Kenneth Muir’s *The Encyclopedia of Superheroes on Film and Television*, the ‘twentieth-century archetype of mankind at its finest’ (ironic since he is not human), one can see the connections of super strength and speed immediately.³⁸ Edward’s ability to stop Tyler’s car from crushing Bella is reminiscent of the iconic image of Superman stopping a train with his bare hands. This speed allows for Edward to escape his enemies and reach Bella before she gets into trouble. As well as being superhuman, they both have a weakness. Superman’s weakness is a rock known as kryptonite, from the planet Krypton, whereas for Edward, Bella’s mortality is one of the few obstacles that has the potential to cause his demise. Superman’s feigned humanity and weakness for kryptonite are similar to the issues that Edward must deal with throughout the saga. Edward, like Clark Kent is not human, but superhuman. Although they both appear outwardly to mimic that of the rest of society, they are withholding their true identities in order to fit into the human world.

Although at first glance a superhero, such as Batman, the ‘Caped Crusader’, does not seem to have much in common with a teenaged vampire like Edward Cullen, both Edward and

Bruce Wayne enjoy the life of luxury, including luxury vehicles. Edward and his family's affinity for fast cars like the silver Volvo S60R seem to parallel Bruce Wayne's expensive taste.

Although Batman and Superman share commonalities with Edward, potentially the most comparable of the heroes is the teenaged Peter Parker, Spiderman. Like Spiderman, Edward is bitten, transforms, and protects his true love using super strength. In his transformation, Spiderman occupies a human body until his flesh is pierced and venom is inserted. When Bella asks Edward if he was 'bit by a radioactive spider,'³⁹ she is not as far from the truth as Edward might have her believe. The reader cannot help but envision Edward in 'superhero' tights. While in Peter Parker's case, this venom is from a radioactive spider, Edward's is from Carlisle Cullen's teeth and vampire venom. The transformation of human to vampire traditionally involves a bite, but never any sort of venom.⁴⁰ The addition of the venom aligns Edward's and Peter's situations. Both transformations afford the 'teens' super strength—amongst other powers—through drastic bodily changes. It is these powers with which they both use to protect those that they love.

It is hard to ignore the similarities between these three superheroes and Edward Cullen. However, Coogan's criteria for the superhero may help determine whether Edward is a superhero or not. Coogan defines the superhero as 'comprising mission, powers, identity, and generic distinction'.⁴¹ Working through these four categories will allow for a comparison of Edward to a superhero. Bella views Edward as a superhero and when a superhero is present, a villain is necessary, for instance, the Volturi. Although they try not to put their family in danger, the Cullens attempt to stop the coven from destroying innocent victims such as Bella. The Cullens have no qualms about murdering other vampires, if it is to protect the lives of helpless humans. For example, instead of running away, the family stands their ground, killing newborn vampires in *Bree*. The mission of the Cullens is to protect the humanity of vampires and the lives of mortals.

Edward's mission has always been to protect his family first, and when Edward fell in love with Bella, she quickly became a part of that family dynamic. After his family, Edward would then protect other humans in danger. Edward is portrayed as the ultimate superhero because of the decisions he makes in protecting human lives by both choosing to be a vegetarian vampire and their superhero protector. Edward demonstrates that he has the will power to break from what is 'natural' for him; instead he makes choices based on his perception of morality. Other vampires cannot understand his decisions, particularly Peter and Charlotte, friends of the Cullens. This is made clear when Edward reads their thoughts: '[m]ust be the animals. The lack of human blood drives them mad eventually.'⁴² Clearly this goes against what is deemed normal for the vampires of this Saga.

Although Edward has opted out of the tights and cape aspect of his superhero lifestyle, what he lacks in costume, he makes up for in super powers, gadgets and other familiar qualities of a superhero. Edward is able to run fast, use super strength, 'dazzle', read minds as well as having access to the use of multiple fast vehicles—all of these qualities lead to an overwhelmingly 'superheroic' categorization of Edward's super powers.

Although he does not have an obvious dual persona, as your standard superhero might typically have, I would argue that Edward's costume is his human façade. Although he does not perhaps reach the criteria as set out by Coogan under 'costume', Edward's costume is a part of his 'dual identity'. The Cullen family do not only wear this costume, but have made it into a lifestyle, attempting to erase their vampiric nature entirely. This duality is a quality that is central to the identity of most superheroes and Edward is no exception. Having a strong father figure to emulate in Carlisle Cullen and a solid family structure, Edward leads a relatively human lifestyle. He actively participates in regular teenaged activities such as attending school,⁴³ all the while attempting to hide his powers until they are needed. However, when

Bella stumbles into the path of danger—which is often—this façade unravels as Edward turns monstrous to protect his loved ones. When told from Edward’s perspective in *Midnight Sun*, the monster that he feels from within is made manifest in one of two faces he sees.⁴⁴ These faces represent the duality of Edward’s existence: human versus monstrous. It is fitting that Carlisle’s face is representative of his human side, or his exterior façade, as he is the head of the household as well as the one who encourages the family’s morality. These qualities position Edward within the realm of the superhero.

4. Super-Hero

Both superheroes and vampires have a sort of link to humanity in that they are usually human—or at least used to be—however, it is rare that one character is able to transcend all three roles as Edward has, encompassing particular aspects of the vampire, human, and superhero. Although the connections to traditional superheroes are ample, as Bella often points out, I propose that the term super-hero is more accurate for the super-natural hero. A super-hero⁴⁵ is one who chooses to use their supernatural powers for good, although it goes against their natural desire to be evil. Edward Cullen is a perfect example of this type of hero. As is made evident in *Midnight Sun*, his vampiric nature desires to drink Bella’s blood, however his moral conscious and love ‘At First Sight’ makes him value her life, thus using his abilities for the good of mankind; to save humans, as well as to defeat the evil of the Volturi. As in the Saga, the hero must protect his love, all the while fighting the villain who often targets the love interest in order to harm the hero. But what happens when the superhero here is also a vampire, with human qualities more moral than most actual humans? A Super-hero.

This super-hero may even be seen as a postmodern figure. Jean-Francois Lyotard explains in his article ‘Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?’ that the postmodern ‘would be that which in the moderns puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself’.⁴⁶ The un-presentable is in fact represented in Edward’s occupancy of three opposing character roles. Lyotard moreover argues that it is postmodernists’ ‘business not to supply reality, but to invent allusions to the conceivable[,] which cannot be presented’.⁴⁷ The super-hero exists to remind the reader of the complexity of the non-fictive world. Although it is easy to note where The Twilight Saga reinscribes hegemonic archetypes, the notion of Edward as a super-hero indeed questions the power of these traditions. If the novels were in fact merely a retelling the narratives of the past, then Edward and the rest of the Cullens would either (a) stay vampires and be evil or (b) be your standard superhero, as outlined previously by Coogan. However this is not the case and the readers are forced to break from the limiting binaries of good versus evil to challenge the representation of Edward’s character as villainous, human and superheroic. When Edward challenges Bella to think beyond archetypal patterns he questions ‘I hope you were more creative this time... or are you still stealing from comic books?’.⁴⁸ Meyer is acknowledging her use of intertextuality throughout the novels, through obvious similarities between Edward and the traditional superheroes, yet her characterization of Edward causes one to question the one dimensional characters typically found within popular narratives.

5. Conclusion

It is Edward’s humanity that transforms his supernatural powers, causing him to become not merely a superhero in the traditional sense, but a super-hero in the newly defined supernatural hero manner. The age-old story of good versus evil may still remain, but the Saga challenges the limitations typically bestowed upon characters such as Edward. Although The Twilight Saga perpetuates many different ideologies, playing the roles of superhero, human, and vampire, Edward becomes a complex character, contradicting each role through the existence of the others. Edward becomes a postmodern hero with the introduction of *Midnight*

Sun destroying the image of him as Adonis; instead appearing as a very flawed individual wrought with inner demons. The roles that Edward takes on become exaggerated, as he manages to contain three roles that by ‘nature’ cannot coincide together. This rejection of grand narratives presents Edward as relatable to his readers, because humans are complex beings that do not fit into one archetype, as literary characters often do.

It is not valuable to pigeonhole Edward, nor any other character into a particular archetype; instead one should challenge the authority of these roles. Since these archetypes are being challenged through the character of Edward Cullen, the lack of an answer will hopefully cause the monster fan readers of the future to challenge these same desired binaries of human versus monstrous. Nothing is black and white, and the answer is never as simple as discovering what is right and wrong. Do traditional villains or monsters perpetuate the age-old notion that evil is unchangeable and obvious? Many would argue that in today’s society, continuing to display villains in direct opposition to the hero is limiting and promotes universal fallacies. Edward is portrayed as a closer representation of the human reader, through the multiple variations presented concerning his character’s complexity. After he protects Bella from being killed, Edward exclaims that it was ‘[q]uite the reversal of roles. Somewhere during that short thoughtless second when I’d sprinted across the icy lot, I had transformed from killer to protector’.⁴⁹ These roles are not singular, but collective. The ‘killer and protector’, or vampire and superhero co-exist alongside Edward’s human persona, thus occupying three unique aspects of one complex character.

Notes

¹ Stephenie Meyer, *Twilight* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2005), 89.

² Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957), 99.

³ Beth E. McDonald, *The Vampire as Numinous Experience: Spiritual Journeys with the Undead in British and American Literature* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co.), 2004.

⁴ An illegal partial draft of a version on *Twilight* as told through the eyes of Edward, was leaked onto the internet in 2008. Meyer put an indefinite hold on the project, but decided to publish the partial draft on her website.

⁵ Stephenie Meyer, *Midnight Sun* (*The Official Website of Stephenie Meyer*, 28 Aug. 2008) Viewed 10 Apr. 2011, <stepheniemeyer.com>, 12.

⁶ McDonald, *Vampire as Numinous*, 23.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 21, 23.

⁸ Meyer, *Twilight*, 167.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 168.

¹⁰ Meyer, *Midnight Sun*, 182.

¹¹ Meyer, *Twilight*, 124.

¹² Meyer, *Midnight Sun*, 11, 78.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁴ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 129.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁶ Not myth as in the Barthesian sense, but instead meaning ‘false’.

¹⁷ Meyer, *Twilight*, 185-86.

¹⁸ See Martin J. Wood’s essay ‘New Life for an Old Tradition’, in *The Blood is the Life: Vampires in Literature*, 61.

- ¹⁹ Stephenie Meyer, *The Short Second Life of Bree Tanner* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2010), 176.
- ²⁰ Meyer, *Twilight*, 22.
- ²¹ Stephenie Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2008), 22.
- ²² Meyer, *Twilight*, 251.
- ²³ Meyer, *Bree Tanner*, 42.
- ²⁴ Meyer, *Midnight Sun*, 4.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 238.
- ²⁶ William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. Jill L. Levenson (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), V.iii.101-102.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, Prologue.
- ²⁸ Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (New York: Riverhead, 1999), 6.
- ²⁹ Meyer, *Midnight Sun*, 26.
- ³⁰ Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, III.i.75-77.
- ³¹ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957), 163.
- ³² Meyer, *Twilight*, 138.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 92.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*
- ³⁵ Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 160.
- ³⁶ Peter M. Coogan, *Superhero: The Secret Origin of a Genre* (Austin: MonkeyBrain, 2006), 30.
- ³⁷ Meyer, *Twilight*, 89.
- ³⁸ John Kenneth Muir, *The Encyclopedia of Superheroes on Film and Television* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2004), 468.
- ³⁹ Meyer, *Twilight*, 92.
- ⁴⁰ Martin J. Wood, 'New Life for an Old Tradition', in *The Blood is the Life: Vampires in Literature* (Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999) 61.
- ⁴¹ Coogan, *Secret Origin*, 58.
- ⁴² Meyer, *Midnight Sun*, 165.
- ⁴³ In the film adaptation, the family's dozens of graduation caps have been turned into a piece of art, an inside joke.
- ⁴⁴ Meyer, *Midnight Sun*, 12.
- ⁴⁵ Differing from Coogan's super-hero, the 'super' here is reliant on the supernatural qualities of the character.
- ⁴⁶ Jean-Francois Lyotard, 'Answering the Question: What Is Postmodernism?' *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh. 4th ed. (New York: Oxford UP, 2002), 337.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 337.
- ⁴⁸ Meyer, *Twilight*, 171.
- ⁴⁹ Meyer, *Midnight Sun*, 66.

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The Alchemy of Myth and Fairytale in The Twilight Saga

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Abstract

Likely originating from a Greco-Roman folktale and situated within the second century book, the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius, the tale of 'Cupid and Psyche', equally known as 'Eros and Psyche', is often read as the transformative union of the soul with love and a portrayal of the alchemical process. The essence of the tale found a form in the 'Beauty and the Beast' fable yet its spirit continues to thrive in current literature. Containing similar alchemical analogies to the 'Eros and Psyche' myth, The Twilight Saga also describes the relationship between an immortal and a mortal. At defining moments, Psyche pricks her finger on an arrow and Bella gets a paper cut; Psyche and Bella are both abandoned and must undergo a process of reacquiring their lost loves to achieve immortality in the end. There have been several interpretations of the 'Eros and Psyche' myth through archetypal theorists. The Jungian perspective of Eros as the puer aeternus or eternal boy matches the archetypal qualities of Edward in The Twilight Saga. Although he has walked this earth for over a century, Edward still lives with his surrogate mother and father, forever trapped in his youth. Jungians tend to regard the 'Eros and Psyche' myth as a depiction of the awakening of consciousness.¹ Robert Johnson sees Eros as the experience of love which supplies many in this secular age their sole contact with the divine.² In The Twilight Saga, religion seems conspicuously absent. It is the immortal Edward who fills this spiritual void for Bella. By examining the similar numinous qualities of the vampire Edward with those of the god Eros, the perils of descent the protagonists Bella and Psyche encounter combined with their ascent and drastic transformation, one will see several parallels between the Twilight Saga and the 'Eros and Psyche' myth and its esoteric foundations.

Key Words: Vampire, God, alchemy, mythology, fables, Cupid and Psyche, Jung, Twilight Saga.

There is an undeniable abundance of lore contained within The Twilight Saga. This can be noted on a very esoteric scale simply by acknowledging the prevalence of supernatural characters within its pages. In a saga that simultaneously contains vampires and shapeshifters, it does not seem implausible that the basic structure of an ancient and enduring myth would be present within the underlying content. A sustained look at the work will eventually reveal a strong similarity between it and the text which inspired the popular fairytale, 'Beauty and the Beast', known variously as 'Cupid and Psyche' or 'Eros and Psyche'. One way to uncover this revelation is to have an understanding of the basic structural properties of such tales. Knowledge of the Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson (AT) classification system and a system derived from the stories in the Grimms' *Kinder und Hausmärchen* (KHM) (Children's and Household Tales)³ used to identify comparable structural patterns within works allows for a very strong basis of comparison. Once it is revealed that a particular piece such as The Twilight Saga contains the same structural patterns as 'Eros and Psyche', there is allowance for an even deeper look. It just so happens that 'Eros and Psyche' is an extremely richly layered piece, often considered to be so much more than a morality tale, its origins reach back to the Greco-Roman mystery cults and the tale is commonly believed to have emerged out of a fascination with alchemical practices. The fact that 'Eros and Psyche' is often considered an esoteric alchemical

manual allows for an alchemical analysis of all of its derivatives including 'Beauty and the Beast' and the recent Twilight Saga.

Alchemy itself seems to be enjoying a newfound popularity as it is arguably situated within other current fiction, the most obvious being the *Harry Potter* series by J. K. Rowling. The prospect of the presence of alchemical motifs within The Twilight Saga is not an unusual concept; John Granger discusses it in a section within his text, *Spotlight* and there is likely a plethora of books that suggest this idea as well. Yet it is not commonly known that in addition to literary motifs, there is an entire methodical alchemical structure embedded within particular texts. This structure had been embedded within the basic outline of certain ancient Greco-Roman texts, it is a structure that has survived within the pages of some of our most popular fairytales and this embedded structure continues to thrive within certain volumes of current popular fiction. This seems like a fascinating topic to pursue and will be the subject of this paper. Led on by these powerful clues, it proves a very rewarding task to uncover the abundant and unexpected similarities between the intensely rich 'Eros and Psyche' tale and its various counterparts.

The tale of 'Cupid and Psyche', equally known as 'Eros and Psyche' is one of the most popular stories contained within Apuleius' renowned second-century book, the *Metamorphoses*. It is noteworthy to mention that this tale has preoccupied psychologists to a similar extent as the *Oedipus* myth.⁴ Literary studies generally emphasize the similarities between the trials of the protagonist, Lucius, within the *Metamorphoses* and those of Psyche, the protagonist within 'Eros and Psyche.' The account of Lucius' religious experience in the *Metamorphoses* outlines the process of initiation into the ancient Greco-Roman mystery cults which culminates with a vision of Isis, his spiritual guide.⁵ As a result, the embedded tale of 'Eros and Psyche' is often read as a sacred tale illustrating the transformative union of the soul with the spirit and a portrayal of the esoteric alchemical process which was diligently pursued in the ancient Greco-Roman culture. As Jungian Marie-Louise von Franz notes in reference to this ancient practice, 'The holy technique—hiera technē—refers to alchemy,' and was a part of initiation.⁶ The purpose of spiritual alchemy is to provide us with a guideline on how to improve and transform ourselves. Spiritual alchemy's time-honoured and cross-cultural basic truths continue to be structural pillars not only within 'Eros and Psyche' but also throughout various fairytales and even in modern young adult fiction including the popular Twilight Saga.

There is considerable speculation over whether the tale of 'Eros and Psyche' should be understood to have been uniquely designed to illustrate rites of initiation or to have evolved from a pre-existing tale with a similar structural basis. Its essence, however, can certainly be traced within fairytales that follow, including the well-known tale mentioned previously, 'Beauty and the Beast.' As discussed earlier, there are two major classification systems in existence for folk and fairy-tale motifs: the Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson (AT) classification system and a system derived from the stories in the Grimms' *Kinder und Hausmärchen* (KHM) (Children's and Household Tales).⁷ 'Beauty and the Beast' as a folktale is classified as type KHM 88. The motifs of this type involve a daughter who is presented by her father to a monster for an uncertain fate. She goes willingly, becomes enamoured of her monstrous husband, and then loses him by violating a specific prohibition. After various trials she locates him in a transformed state, he is reinstated to his human form, and they live happily ever after.⁸ In the Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson classification, 'Beauty and the Beast' is variant C of the AT 425 classification, the bride's search for her missing groom. However, as pointed out by Pasquale Accardo in *The Metamorphosis of Apuleius*, 'Beauty and the Beast' also fulfils the classification for subtype A, where the lost husband is a monster.

Accardo also mentions that the tale of 'Eros and Psyche' is the earliest recorded version of type AT 425A.⁹ As type AT 425A, the 'Eros and Psyche' tale is categorized by elements of a

supernatural husband, a marriage, a breaking of a certain taboo, a search for the husband and a reunion.¹⁰ The search motif is the dominant aspect of type 425 tales and is why 'Beauty and the Beast', which emerged in France during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, falls under this classification. Three of the most prominent writers of the French fairytale genre have each left a rendition of 'Eros and Psyche' in the guise of the folktale 'Beauty and the Beast.'¹¹ These renditions came into existence shortly after translations and adaptations of the original started appearing. The full text of the classic tale had been translated into French in 1522 and again in 1586. Also, the 'Eros and Psyche' tale had been expanded into a romance in 1669 and the Psyche legend was adapted for the stage in 1671 and 1678.¹² Marie-Catherine Le Jumel de Barneville, Comtesse d'Aulnoy (1651-1750), was the most popular author of these new fairytales. D'Aulnoy's 1696 'Green Serpent' is an obvious and admitted derivation from the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius. In 1740, the first modern version of 'Beauty and the Beast' is 'invented' by Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve (1695-1755). This version is a fairly literal translation of the plot of 'Eros and Psyche' in which several aspects of her tale also reflected components of Apuleius's larger novel. Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont's 1756 version of 'Beauty and the Beast' is the simplest and the most popular, directed towards the education and moral conditioning of children.¹³

A work from our postmodern era appears to have had similar influence from the 'Eros and Psyche' tale and its derivatives. Containing comparable esoteric alchemical analogies to 'Eros and Psyche,' The Twilight Saga also describes the relationship between an immortal male and a mortal girl. In both stories, the protagonists are abandoned and must undergo a process of reacquiring their lost loves thus initiating the motif of the search, the defining feature of tale type AT 425. Variant A also exists, the husband is a monster. In fact, in *Eclipse*, Bella flat out calls it, 'I want to be a monster, too.'¹⁴ Through this aspect, one can see that all three tales, 'Eros and Psyche,' 'Beauty and the Beast' and The Twilight Saga are related through the tale type AT 425 structure.

It is the attempt of this study to reengage Jungian perspectives. Current scholarship may argue that Jungian thought has been exhausted; however, it does seem appropriate to return to Jung when considering 'Eros and Psyche.' Jungians have dealt extensively with 'Eros and Psyche' and alchemical symbolism, while Jung himself is responsible for the revival of alchemical symbolism in the early 1900s, emphasizing its relevance in the analysis of the psyche. Jung's interest in alchemical symbolism first found expression in 1929 in his commentary to *The Secret of the Golden Flower* and concluded with his 1955 opus, *Mysterium Coniunctionis*.¹⁵ Jungians, in tandem with Freudians are responsible for the bulk of psychological interpretation of 'Eros and Psyche.'

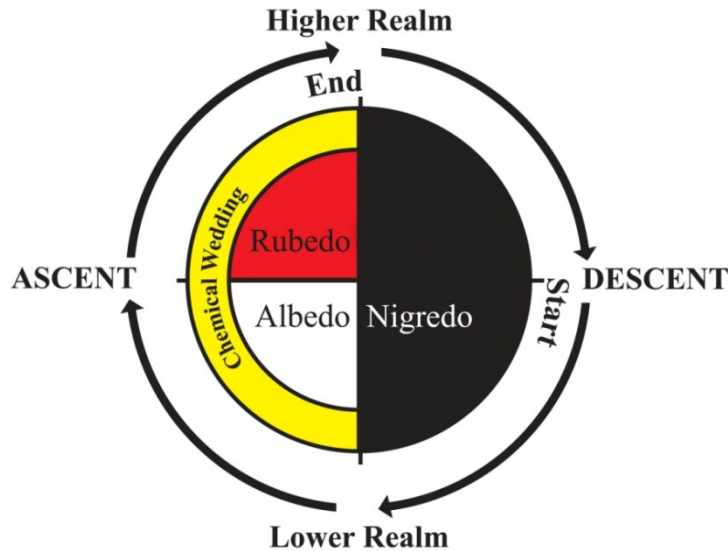
The structures of alchemy are still relevant within current literature. Northrop Frye, one of this century's leading literary theorists, although not necessarily a proponent of Jung's work, held a similar fascination with alchemy. As noted by Jeffrey Donaldson and Alan Mendelson in *Frye and the Word: Religious Contexts in the Writings of Northrop Frye*, 'Alchemy is one of the symbolic systems that most interested Frye; he read widely in alchemical literature, and there are hundreds of references to it in the notebooks.'¹⁶ Generally, current perspectives run in opposition to the grand narrative of archetypal theory yet the esoteric goal of alchemy, spiritual development, is still sought after by an increasingly secular society. In an interpretation of Jungian Robert Johnson's perspective in his 1976 work, *She: Understanding Feminine Psychology*, James Gollnick indicates that as the experience of human love, Eros provides many in this secular age their only contact with the divine.¹⁷ As Johnson's insight makes clear, the desire for contact with the numinous or spiritual aspect of life continues to exist with or without religious intervention. This necessity for a numinous encounter is illustrated in The Twilight Saga where religion seems conspicuously absent. It is the immortal vampire, Edward, who fills

this spiritual void for Bella as can be noted through the spiritual terms she uses to describe him. She may flatly say ‘He looked like a god’¹⁸ as she does at one point in *New Moon* or allude to his numinosity as she describes him to be, ‘like a marble tribute to some forgotten pagan god of beauty.’¹⁹ In this sense, he maintains an omnipotent hold over her, guiding her on her spiritual quest as Eros guides Psyche on her path to transformation. By examining the numinous quality of Edward, the perils of descent Bella encounters throughout the series combined with her ascent towards fulfilment and drastic transformation into an immortal being, one will see several relations to the ‘Eros and Psyche’ myth and its esoteric foundations.

Since the tale of ‘Eros and Psyche’ can be approached as an esoteric alchemical text, it is necessary to explain the alchemical process in some detail. Alchemy is best known as the archaic aspiration to turn lead into gold, but alchemy also has a spiritual aspect where the processes are viewed from a strictly allegorical standpoint. From a spiritual perspective, the process of turning the lead of ordinary experience into the gold of wisdom was referred to by alchemists variously as the ‘opus,’ the ‘transformation,’ or the ‘metamorphosis.’²⁰ Hence, the name of Apuleius’ book, the *Metamorphoses*. In alchemy, there are generally three main classes of operations including the chemical wedding which, although originally deemed a fourth stage is now generally amalgamated into one of the others. These three main alchemical classes are nigredo (blackness) or symbolic death, albedo (whiteness) or purification and rubedo (redness), the transformation through fire. Generally, the chemical wedding would take place during the albedo or the rubedo stage of the process. The chemical wedding is simply an analogy for the union of two opposites and refers to an amalgam of iron and copper or a compound of sulphur and mercury.²¹ Jung has observed in *Mysterium Coniunctionis* that when the alchemist referred to this union, he meant it at the same time as a symbol. Jung observed that, ‘Iron was Mars and copper was Venus, and their fusion was at the same time, a love affair.’²² The chemical wedding is known as the citrinitas (yellowing) stage which represents dawn or awakening. In The Twilight Saga, this chemical wedding occurs in the *Breaking Dawn* novel. In addition to these basic stages, there is a cyclical movement that starts with a downward motion, often culminating in a journey through the underworld. It then shifts to a movement upwards towards enlightenment. This cyclical pattern could be compared to the cycle of nature. As Northrop Frye explains in *Anatomy of Criticism*, the vegetable world supplies us with the annual cycle of seasons, often represented by a divine figure that dies in the autumn or is killed with the gathering of the harvest, disappears in winter, and revives in spring.²³ The movement towards winter is represented by a downward cycle, while the transition to summer and rebirth of vegetation is embodied by an upwards cycle.

For the alchemical cycle to be initiated, the participant must be, however reluctantly, willing to engage in the transformation. In *Eros and Psyche*, Psyche bravely embarks on her journey, which begins with a funerary wedding where she is fated to marry a venomous dragon. Here, Psyche undertakes a voluntary sacrifice in her processional march towards her fate. This sacrificial journey can also be noted in Madame de Villeneuve and Madame de Beaumont’s versions of ‘Beauty and the Beast’ as well where Beauty voluntarily embarks on a journey towards a presumably unhappy fate at the Beast’s palace in her father’s stead.²⁴ Similarly in The Twilight Saga, Bella initiates her journey by making the decision to move to Forks, a place that she has disliked since she was a child. In fact, Bella’s move is in the form of a sacrifice. Bella corrects Edward’s assumption that she was sent to Forks by her mother, ‘No, she did not send me here. I sent myself.’²⁵ Bella sent herself to Forks so that her mother could travel with her new husband, ‘She stayed with me at first, but she missed him. It made her unhappy... so I decided it was time to spend some quality time with Charlie.’²⁶ Sacrifices such as this are characteristic of the initial nigredo phase of the alchemical process, which is primarily associated with the colour black, a motion of descent and the theme of symbolic death.²⁷

Alchemical Process Within All Three Tales



Several symbolic deaths occur during this nigredo phase including the death of the childhood home, which is what occurs within the sacrificial journeys described earlier.²⁸ Other symbolic deaths involve the death of outmoded aspirations and habits.²⁹ This nigredo phase contains two components, calcination and dissolution. In alchemy, calcination involves the reduction of material to ashes whereas dissolution dissolves the ashes in water. This nigredo phase of symbolic death will eventually culminate into a veritable underworld journey. Descent imagery is characterized by images of the double, an elastic perception of time and often contains a dream-like quality.³⁰ Many, if not all of these features exist within 'Eros and Psyche', 'Beauty and the Beast', as well as *The Twilight Saga*.

In *Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye notes that in the Christian tradition, time begins with the fall from a liberated state into the natural cycle. He asserts that the feeling of nemesis being involved with the movement of time and a recognition that time is out of joint are characteristics of this stage.³¹ In *New Moon*, one sees time delineated through the months of October to January when Bella is in a particularly weakened state. The book itself undergoes a type of fragmentation at this point. Each month has its own page devoted to it, its name isolated upon that page. At the end of this fragmentary portion of the book, we see Bella still preoccupied with time as she states,

Time passes. Even when it seems impossible. Even when each tick of the second hand aches like the pulse of blood behind a bruise. It passes unevenly, in strange lurches and dragging lulls, but pass it does. Even for me.³²

Even in 'Eros and Psyche,' time plays a substantial role during this phase as Eros' mother, Aphrodite (Venus in the Roman variant) assigns time limits for Psyche to complete her impossible tasks. Also, in *Beauty and the Beast*, Beauty's disregard for time launched her

descent, which involves a search for the dying Beast. In the version by de Villeneuve, the Beast is found dying within a cave, a fitting subterranean locale for the descent theme.

In *The Secular Scripture*, Frye describes two types of descent themes. One is the descent from a higher world such as heaven or Eden, and the other is into a subterranean or submarine world beneath this one.³³ In *The Twilight Saga*, Bella's descent originates in the first book and continues into *New Moon*, where her veritable underworld journey occurs as she descends into the lair of the dangerous Volturi vampire coven. Frye emphasizes that the concept of disappearing into one's own mirror image or entering a world of reversed or reduced dimensions is a central symbol of descent.³⁴ Frye explains, 'At lower levels the Narcissus or twin image darkens into a sinister doppelgänger figure, the hero's shadow and the portent of his own death or isolation.'³⁵ In 'Eros and Psyche', this theme emerges with society's false perception of Psyche as the goddess of love incarnate (Eros' mother, Aphrodite or Venus in the Roman equivalent). As society begins to worship Psyche as such, she unwillingly evolves into the goddess' doppelgänger, inciting her rage and heralding Psyche's descent. It seems that Bella has an equivalent to this adversary in the form of Edward's sister, Rosalie. Bella describes Rosalie as the incarnation of pure beauty, a clear trait of said goddess.³⁶ This particular parallel between the texts is significant since it is a defining feature of the descent theme. Another interesting comparison about this particular detail is that Rosalie was meant to be Edward's partner but Edward did not choose her. The fact that Bella has taken the place reserved for Rosalie parallels with the worship of Psyche as Aphrodite in 'Eros and Psyche.' Thus, the doppelgänger motif, a characteristic of the descent, is existent in both texts.

In *Fantastic Metamorphoses, Other Worlds*, Marina Warner states that demonology, ghosts, projections, and photographs are bound up in the figure of the double through the devil's association with illusion. This connection explains the principle of doubling as a variety of metamorphosis.³⁷ Warner uses Madame de Villeneuve's version of 'Beauty and the Beast' to illustrate this aspect of enchantment,

Beauty in the Beast's palace is given a magic glass in which she can see the world, and she discovers there a charming youth who gives her pleasurable intimations, but who will only be revealed to be the Beast's true doppelgänger at the happy ending.³⁸

It should be noted that the descent has begun at this point, which means that the alchemical process has already begun, its ultimate goal being transformation. This is the ultimate goal of most forms of magic as well. As Warner points out,

The arts of simulation govern the successful performance of magic. Making simulacra—puppets and figures—forms the chief basis of casting spells... Moreover, magic when not used to divine the future was above all concerned with producing change, as harm or healing, it rules over metamorphosis.³⁹

This is significant for Bella as well because transformation is the ultimate outcome of the saga. Since transformation has been shown to maintain a link with magic, we see a magical component within this particular saga.

In some cultures, mirrors are believed to contain one's soul.⁴⁰ This concept could explain the tradition of the reflection-free vampire since, in traditional lore, vampires lack souls. During the initial phases of Bella's nigredo, mirrors become a prominent motif, starting at the close of *Twilight* and continuing into the early pages of *New Moon*. In fact, *New Moon*, considered the height of Bella's nigredo by John Granger, writer of *Spotlight*, opens with Bella

dreaming about glancing at herself in a mirror. As Sir James George Frazer points out in *Golden Bough*, ‘The Greeks regarded it as an omen of death if a man dreamed of seeing himself reflected in water.’⁴¹ Frazer also points out that as some believe their soul to be in the shadow, so others believe it to be in their reflection in water or a mirror.⁴² In *Twilight*, Bella gets lured to a dance studio by the vampire James, bent on annihilating her. Here, James repeatedly throws Bella into the mirrors. This breaking of mirrors is highly symbolic since the fragmentation of the psyche is already suggested by the introduction of mirrors. Thus, a broken mirror would be suggestive of even further fragmentation of the psyche. Other imagery suggestive of fragmentation is also in existence including a television playing a video of Bella as a child and a video camera recording her in the present. This imagery not only plays with the doppelgänger theme but the elasticity of time as well. Bella’s mother also exists within the video and the sound of her voice momentarily confuses Bella into thinking her actual mother is present within the studio. Bella’s abuse at the hands of the rogue vampire, James, eventually reaches an impasse and she drifts into unconsciousness.

As Frye notes, the break in the continuity of identity has analogies to falling asleep and entering a dream world. Frye emphasizes that this is a world of increased erotic intensity and that we are often reminded of this type of descent by the imagery of the hunt.⁴³ This is what we see within The Twilight Saga with James, the vampire who prides himself as the ultimate tracker. The motif of the search has an aspect of the hunt and occurs within all three stories. In ‘Eros and Psyche’ and The Twilight Saga, the protagonists must pursue their fleeing love interests while in ‘Beauty and the Beast,’ the love interest is dying in a hidden locale that the protagonist must locate. In the structure of alchemy, this motif of the search is initiated in the calcination stage of the nigredo, which will be discussed in the following section.

In *Alchemy of the Soul*, Martin Lowenthal states that, ‘In the first stage, a serpent or dragon appears as Eros, who is born of the “dragon breed.”’⁴⁴ It must be noted here that Eros is the Cupid archetype and his arrows serve the same purpose. As an elemental reference, Eros is associated with fire because his arrows engender the fire of desire.⁴⁵ In reference to the animal kingdom, Eros is associated with the bee, dragon or winged serpent because of his power to wound with his venomous arrows. For Eros, however, the venom is actually passion.⁴⁶ In The Twilight Saga, this dragon figure is Edward. As a vampire, Edward also has the ability to inflict an equally powerful, flame-inducing venom. As an alchemical motif, the dragon is thought to have two paradoxical qualities: one quality of destruction reduces one to their essential nature (*prima materia*) while the other quality embodies one’s creative nature.⁴⁷ This destructive nature manifests itself within the *New Moon* portion of The Twilight Saga on Bella’s birthday when Edward abandons her. We witness this process in ‘Eros and Psyche’ as well. In both stories, the abandonment follows a broken taboo. In *New Moon*, Bella acquired a bloody paper cut while visiting Edward’s vampire family during a birthday party at their house. This accident caused Edward’s adopted sibling Jasper to lose control. As a hapless mortal, it is definitely taboo for Bella to break skin in the company of vampires who are trying to refrain from such temptations.

As could be supposed, the pricking of the finger is significant as well, whether through the piercing of an arrow or by paper cut. It is fairly common in fairytales but what does it mean? An open wound could symbolize one’s openness for change, but this idea is not substantiated. Despite the obvious inclination to interpret the introduction of blood pouring from a maiden’s open wound as an analogy of sexual ripeness (which it very well may be), in alchemical terms, however, its symbolism is slightly different. As mentioned by Lyndy Abraham in *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, the alchemical blood appears in various forms throughout the process. It first occurs as the initial blood of death and sacrifice, when the outmoded state of being is killed in order to be renewed.⁴⁸ It seems fitting that this particular blood in Bella’s scenario is spilled

while in the company of Edward and his clan, the ones who will eventually usher her onto her new path in life. The theme of blood as sacrifice is especially charged in regards to vampires due to its role as sustenance which may, in fact, harken from certain archaic beliefs that the soul is contained within the blood.⁴⁹ This highlights the reason why vampires are believed in traditional folklore to be without souls as they have a hard time keeping blood contained within their bodies.

Psyche pricked her finger on an arrow but her act of taboo was to sneak a forbidden glance at Eros who, like Edward, has a luminescent quality. Under the glow of her lantern ‘...she saw the most meeke and sweetest beast of all beasts... the brightnesse whereof did darken the light of the lamp.’⁵⁰ Prior to this event, Psyche was only allowed to experience her lover blindly through his night-time visits. These visits parallel Edward’s evening interludes with Bella in her room. Whereas Edward enters through the window, Eros uses the window as his passage out of the bedroom after the taboo is broken. In ‘Beauty and the Beast’, Beauty breaks a taboo by failing to return to Beast at the promised time. As in all the stories, the breaking of the taboo seems to be the crucial point when the search for the lost mate begins. Prior to the breaking of the taboo, Bella witnesses Edward’s iridescence within the beautiful (and, dare I say, mythical) meadow in the light of the sun. Although this revelation was sanctioned by Edward, it is still quite relevant. James Gollnick sees the tale of ‘Eros and Psyche’ as an allegorical dream experienced by the protagonist, Lucius in the *Metamorphoses*. In *The Religious Dreamworld of Apuleius*, he refers to this portion of the tale:

This is the Eros who possesses Psyche in the dark early in the tale and forbids her to see him, that is, to know him consciously. The taboo against Psyche seeing Eros would be an effective way for a dream to express symbolically Lucius’ manner of relating to others primarily out of lust and curiosity, that is, Eros in the dark. When Psyche directs the light of the lamp on Eros, she sees the beauty of relationship for what it can be..., but when the oil from the lamp burns him and he sees that she has broken the taboo, he flies from her.⁵¹

The revelation signifies a shift from lustful curiosity to a more mature form of love. However, as the taboo indicates, the protagonists are not prepared for this experience. Eros’ and Edward’s abandonment initiates the necessary transformative process for each protagonist. This is known as the ‘death of the profane’ where base or profane values are replaced by sacred variants. In alchemical terms, this process is referred to as calcination or the reduction of a substance to ashes.⁵² As emblems of fire, what better catalysts for this process than Eros and Edward?

During this phase in ‘Eros and Psyche’, a seabird reports a regression in the state of affairs following his departure:

And so there is no Pleasure, no Grace, no Wit, but everything is ugly, unkempt, and repulsive. There are no conjugal relations, and no friendships, and nobody even caresses his children.⁵³

It is evident that Eros has power over the emotions yet the agricultural element often associated with ancient gods especially those associated with fertility appears to be absent but does in fact exist. In ‘Eros and Psyche’, when Eros is out of circulation, it is the goddess of the harvest refuses to shelter Psyche from the wrath of his mother. In *The Twilight Saga* we see a similar reference within *New Moon* during Edward’s absence. First of all, *New Moon* makes a very clear point of delineating the exact months of Edward’s departure, which occurs in the degenerative months of late fall and winter. Pages 85 to 92 of *New Moon* simply state one word

per page, the months October to January in an attempt to illustrate the banality of Bella's existence after Edward's departure. On page 93, Bella appears to wake from her vegetative state, but it is not until page 234 that Bella returns to their meadow sanctuary and sees that its magic is gone. Bella first admits that the place was not nearly so stunning without the sunlight and that it was the wrong season for wildflowers, but goes on to realize, 'It was the same place... but it didn't hold what I had been searching for.'⁵⁴ She continues, 'I wasn't exactly sure what I'd hoped to feel here, but the meadow was empty of atmosphere, empty of everything, just like everywhere else.'⁵⁵ Here, the vegetation god properties of Edward are alluded to along with analogies of his regenerative and destructive properties. In Sir James George Frazer's *Golden Bough*, it is indicated that gods like Isis and Demeter, amongst others, represent both the death and the revival of vegetation.⁵⁶ As potential descendents of these vegetation deities, Mary Y. Hallab notes in *Vampire God, The Allure of the Vampire in Western Culture* that, 'vampires retain their compelling virility and power- not only that of death, but of life and life-giving forces- as part of their very nature.'⁵⁷ The vampire possesses supernatural powers and may enforce control over nature, for instance, in certain folklore the vampire is blamed for the Black Death, failure of crops and mysterious deaths. Thus, vampires embody the numinosity that would emanate from a deity of death and storm as well as vegetation and fertility. Hallab notes, 'Most vampires, like Dracula, rise from death over and over again in an eternal cycle-like gods of the corn and the seasons.'⁵⁸ That said, we can see the connection between the barrenness of the meadow with Edward's absence in *New Moon* and the fertility god aspect of Edward not only through a parallel with the 'Eros and Psyche' myth but through the vampire persona in general.

Edward's more obvious supernatural power, the ability to read minds is also possibly a quality inherent to Eros. For instance, in the myth, Eros is able to predict the plotting of Psyche's two jealous siblings and their intent on Psyche's destruction. Edward is equally able to sense the thoughts of Bella's friends. In fact, he can hear everyone's thoughts except for those of Bella. In 'Eros and Psyche', it is not entirely clear how Eros is able to predict the plotting of Psyche's sisters, whether through mind-reading or premonition. Edward can read minds and with the help of his psychic sister Alice, is able to harness both powers. This is how Edward is able to see Bella jump into the lake, which leads us to the dissolution phase of the work.

Continuing with the theme of symbolic death, dissolution is associated with water, a symbol of the capacity of matter to change. This capacity for change is considered an aspect of the *prima materia* (basic essence), which is what Bella is reduced to in the previous calcination stage. In the story of 'Eros and Psyche', dissolution occurs three times, in images of bathing, tears and streams.⁵⁹ This cyclical nature emerges with tears and rain in *Twilight* and the early stages of *New Moon*, then transitions to a river motif, then on to the motif of snow in *Eclipse*. Here, the *nigredo* stage is still playing out; this can be noted simply by referring to the title, *Eclipse*, a rather common symbol of the *nigredo* phase.⁶⁰

Of all the books in the saga, however, water imagery is most prevalent in *New Moon*. The most memorable water motif occurs when Bella decides to cliff dive on her own. She encounters a near-death experience here and is rescued by Jacob. As a supernatural being and connected to the sacred through the elders of his tribe, Jacob could be loosely viewed as a force of nature. As a shape shifter who assumes the form of a wolf, his participation during this phase and his association with the wolf are not without alchemical significance. As Lyndy Abraham points out in *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, the wolf is synonymous with the mercurial waters of life and death, the universal solvent which dissolves metals, then cleanses, purifies and regenerates them.⁶¹ We already know that Bella represents the metal in this context, the lead that will be transformed to gold. As the alchemical wolf motif that purifies and regenerates, Jacob, who was supposed to cliff dive with her that day, is associated with Bella's jump into the

water symbolizing the dissolution phase of the alchemical process. Jacob is also associated with regenerating properties since he rescues her. Alice had a premonition of this event but falsely interpreted it as a suicide, a motif that also occurs within 'Eros and Psyche.' In this tale, Psyche flings herself into a river in an attempt to end her life. Similarly to The Twilight Saga, a force of nature rescues Psyche. In this case it is the river itself that returns her back to safe ground. In 'Eros and Psyche', Psyche is constantly being guided by the forces of nature on her journey. Graham Anderson states in *Fairytale in the Ancient World*, 'It also seems clear that the whole of nature is helping the soul in its search.'⁶² As an analogy of the soul in this tale, Psyche's attempts to end her life are always thwarted by nature because as we know, the soul is supposed to be immortal. Like Psyche, Bella is being constantly rescued from immanent death as well. In the end, Bella is rendered truly immortal as is Psyche as well.

Within the cyclical journey, derived from nature and inherent within alchemy, a descent is mandatory. This can be depicted as a literal journey through the underworld domain of Persephone as in Psyche's case. It can also be portrayed through a visit to a random subterranean location, which is what Bella experiences when she ventures to Italy to rescue Edward from the Volturi vampires, the largest and most powerful coven in the saga and overseers of the vampire world. Once Bella locates Edward, they are both led by the Volturi into their subterranean lair and after enduring several tests, they are permitted to leave under the condition that Edward will soon transform Bella into a vampire as well. In 'Eros and Psyche', Eros' mother had provided Psyche with a box and instructed her to retrieve a portion of divine beauty from Persephone, goddess of the underworld. Psyche successfully fulfilled her orders. However, she was overcome with a desire to take some for herself and upon opening the box was overcome with the contents. Rather than a beauty ointment, a deep sleep was contained within and she immediately fell victim to its effects. Psyche is rescued by Eros from this deep sleep. Both events signify the beginnings of a reunion for the lovers, which will lead to a stronger bond between them.

The chemical wedding merges the essence of Eros and Psyche. In esoteric terms, this can be likened to Nietzsche's model of the Übermensch and Jung's model of the Self which both seek the union of opposites.⁶³ In Madame de Villeneuve and Madame Beaumont's versions of 'Beauty and the Beast', betrothal has a transformative effect.⁶⁴ For instance, when Beauty agrees to marry the Beast, he is released from the enchantment and is restored to his true form. In alchemy, the chemical wedding is sometimes referred to as the citrinitas or yellowing stage because this is where the transformation to gold is supposed to occur.⁶⁵ The most prominent depiction of gold in The Twilight Saga can be seen in the eye colour of the Cullen coven of which Bella is now a member. The chemical marriage is easy to identify in The Twilight Saga, in 'Eros and Psyche', however, there are two weddings that can be explained through the contrast of sacred and profane love. The first wedding represents that of profane love and the final chemical marriage is the sacred marriage which creates both an alchemist that is a rebis which is, in essence, a dual natured person, and the philosopher's stone.⁶⁶ The dual nature of the rebis is considered an ideal balance of the personality. The philosopher's stone symbolizes enlightenment and represents immortality.

The albedo stage of alchemic transformation is depicted by the colour white, a symbol for the purification properties of this stage. It is fitting at this point to illustrate a comparative motif within the names of both characters. The three meanings of 'psyche' in Greek are life force, soul, and butterfly—the butterfly being the quintessential symbol for metamorphosis.⁶⁷ The three phases in this insect's life span mirror the three stages in the progress of the soul's enlightenment. The caterpillar represents the life stage, the chrysalis represents death, and the butterfly illustrates resurrection.⁶⁸ Bella's last name, Swan, is suggestive of transformation as well since the symbol of the white swan in alchemy heralds the first conscious encounter with

the etheric world which occurs in the albedo stage of the alchemic process.⁶⁹ Ether refers to the spirit world. Since Eros represents the spirit, this stage indicates a higher consciousness in the relationship between spirit and soul, Eros and Psyche and Edward and Bella. As Mircea Eliade notes, 'This stage corresponds, on the spiritual plane, to a resurrection expressed by the assumption of certain states of consciousness inaccessible to the uninitiated.'⁷⁰ In *Breaking Dawn*, a veritable resurrection occurs, but it is highly intertwined with the aspects of the final rubedo process, the fire aspect in particular. As Bella, literally dies in *Breaking Dawn*, it only makes sense that the reanimation that follows signifies her resurrection. Once resurrected, her senses are heightened,

Everything was so clear. Sharp. Defined. The brilliant light overhead was still blinding-bright, and yet I could plainly see the glowing strands of the filaments inside the bulb. I could see each colour of the rainbow in the white light, and, at the very edge of the spectrum, an eighth colour I had no name for.⁷¹

There is a name for this in alchemy, the peacock's tail and Lyndy Abraham describes this as the stage that occurs just prior to the albedo during which the appearance of the peacock's tail is a sign that the dawning of the albedo or re-animation is at hand.⁷² The particular stage within the albedo which initiates the upward cyclical movement is termed fermentation. Frye notes that in this upward movement, the hero is re-enacting the ancient ritual, which in Greek religion is called the anabasis of Kore, the rising of a maiden, Psyche for instance, from a lower to a higher world.⁷³ This does not necessarily mean that the lower world is subterranean. In this particular context, the lower world is our everyday one and the higher world becomes the spiritual plane. In *The Twilight Saga*, this is also the case; Bella reaches a higher consciousness and achieves immortality. The reason why this is linked to the spirit world is because traditionally, the spirit is the only part of us deemed to be immortal, thus the achievement of immortality is a highly spiritual endeavour.

In alchemical literature, the infant philosopher's stone is sometimes personified as a female child. Renesmee is the female child that results from this union in *The Twilight Saga* as well as from the union of 'Eros and Psyche.' This concept identifies with an aspect of Jung's model of the whole self. Jung writes:

If a union is to take place between opposites like... conscious and unconscious... it will happen in a third thing, which represents not a compromise but something new [and again]. The confrontation of the two positions generates a tension charged with energy and creates a living third thing... a movement out of the suspension between opposites, a living birth that leads to a new level of being, a new situation.⁷⁴

A clue to the symbolic nature of the child in these texts can be uncovered by referring to the larger text of the *Metamorphoses*. Here, we see the protagonist, Lucius proclaim his glory at the contemplation of his spiritual guide, Isis with these words: 'ineffable pleasure' (inexplicabili voluptate) thus echoing the name of Psyche's child, Voluptas.⁷⁵ Pleasure is the result of spiritual initiation for Lucius and is also the result of Psyche's spiritual journey but this is where Jung and Nietzsche differ in their concepts of the whole self.⁷⁶ Nietzsche did not believe that another third thing needed to result from the union and in the fairytale version of 'Beauty and the Beast', this detail is absent as well. However, the source tale, 'Cupid and Psyche' does contain this element and as mentioned earlier, if one is to look for definitive alchemical

symbolism, the original source tale is the most important reference. A child is used to symbolize the philosopher's stone because it is such a potent symbol for the unification of two opposites: the opposing genders of the respective parents.

The final stage of the opus is the rubedo, which is symbolized by fire. Since it is the final stage, reaching this point in the process signals alchemical success and completion.⁷⁷ In the rubedo stage, Bella achieves immortality and is finally rendered Edward's equal. This likens, once again, to the crucial balance of forces within both Jung and Nietzsche's models of the whole self. Here, the equal presence of both opposites is essential for the health and development of an individual's personality.⁷⁸ Edward renders Bella immortal by injecting a syringe filled with vampire venom into her heart. As explained in Jacob's words in *Breaking Dawn*,

His stone hand knocked mine out of the way. There was a tiny crunch as his blow broke my little finger. In the same second, he shoved the needle straight into her heart.⁷⁹

The sensation of the venom is of a decidedly burning nature, as Bella describes,

... the flames that were chewing their way out from my heart now, spreading with impossible pain through my shoulders and stomach, scalding their way up my throat, licking at my face.⁸⁰

After three days of enduring the pains of excruciating heat, she emerges as an immortal. Psyche also is transformed but her ordeal is far less dramatic—she is simply handed a goblet of ambrosia and instructed to drink the elixir that will render her immortal.⁸¹ In *The Twilight Saga*, Bella drinks a substance as well which could possibly be likened to the alchemical red elixir. As noted by Lyndy Abraham, 'The red elixir is attained at the final stage of the opus.'⁸² Abraham also specifies that the red elixir is symbolized by many things including blood.⁸³ In *Breaking Dawn*, the final book of the series, Bella is seen drinking this red elixir by the cupful. The symbolic nature of the red elixir is clearly present in the form of blood. As described through Jacob's perspective:

And anyone could see it—the cup full of human blood had made an immediate difference. Her colour was returning, there was a hint of pink in her waxy cheeks. Already she didn't seem to need Rosalie's support so much anymore. Her breathing was easier, and I would swear her heartbeat was stronger, more even.⁸⁴

Much like the ambrosia that renders Psyche immortal, the blood in *The Twilight Saga* invigorates Bella—and it is the fiery vampire venom that succeeds in transforming her. There are some interesting ritualistic techniques connected to the consumption of certain drinks and godly transformation. As Frazer notes in *The Golden Bough*:

The belief in temporary incarnation or inspiration is world-wide. Certain persons are supposed to be possessed from time to time by a spirit or deity. In Mangaia the priests in whom the gods took up their abode from time to time were called 'god-boxes' or, for shortness, 'gods.' Before giving oracles as gods, they drank an intoxicating liquor, and in the frenzy thus produced their wild words were received as the voice of the god.⁸⁵

Another lesser-known mode of producing inspiration is achieved by sucking the fresh blood of a sacrificed victim. Frazer had identified these ideologies from such locales as the temple of Apollo Diradiotes at Argo, Aegira in Acheaa, Southern India, during the festival of the Minahassa in northern Celebes, Rhetra and Hindu Kush.⁸⁶ The person temporarily inspired is understood to have acquired divine knowledge and sometimes divine power as well.⁸⁷ In The Twilight Saga, however, blood strengthens Bella but the god-like attributes of immortality are acquired through the accumulation of the fiery venom thereby making the significance of fire for Bella's transformation highly symbolic. Fire plays an important role in the critical stages of alchemical transformation, in fact, alchemy is sometimes referred to as the art of fire. As mentioned earlier, Eros is regarded as a god of fire, particularly of the fire within the heart.⁸⁸ Thus, it renders quite symbolic that Edward, as an Eros figure, instils the scorching venom directly into Bella's heart. This rubedo stage is also known as coagulation with one of its symbols being the philosopher's stone and this was noted earlier as the personification of a female child, the philosophical orphan. In western alchemy, it is compared to the ruby, pearl, sapphire and diamond whereas in Buddhist teachings, it is depicted as a diamond, the hardest, most indestructible thing on earth.⁸⁹ Chinese alchemy, in fact, refers to it as the 'diamond body' and this would help explain why Edward sparkles.⁹⁰ Since vampires are not known to sparkle in traditional vampire lore, the idea that this is symbolic of the alchemical process is not unfounded. Since Bella has completed the alchemical process, she sparkles now too. In de Beaumont's version of 'Beauty and the Beast', Beast states, 'Even by offering you a crown, I still can't repay you for what you have done.'⁹¹ With the addition of the crown to her ensemble, it can be noted that Beauty sparkles in the end as well.

It can be concluded that Edward's similarities to Eros and the vampires potential origin from fertility gods denotes a parallel between The Twilight Saga and the tale of 'Eros and Psyche.' However, it is only upon unearthing the alchemical symbolism and stages of transformation within both texts that a more definitive comparison manifests itself. A quotation within Hallab's *Vampire God* states that, 'The vampire has assumed the space vacated by God.'⁹² In The Twilight Saga, the absence of conspicuous religion appears to emphasize this point. Edward guides Bella in her spiritual transformation, initiating her symbolic death or nigredo through his abandonment, inspiring her albedo or purification through his reunion with her and initiating her rubedo or transformation through fire by injecting her heart with the burning venom which renders her immortal. By examining the numinous quality of Edward, the perils of descent Bella encounters combined with her ascent and drastic transformation, one will see several relations to the 'Eros and Psyche' myth and its esoteric foundations. The value of alchemical symbolism to depict transformation can be summed up by Jung in *Mysterium Coniunctionis*,

... the entire alchemical procedure ... could just as well represent the individuation process of a single individual, though with the not unimportant difference that no single individual ever attains to the richness and scope of the alchemical symbolism.⁹³

This may be true for humans, but vampires that sparkle are special.

Notes

- ¹ James Gollnick, *The Religious Dreamworld of Apuleius* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1999), 101.
- ² Ibid.
- ³ Pasquale Accardo, *The Metamorphoses of Apuleius* (Massachusetts: Rosemont Publishing and Printing Corp., 2002), 68.
- ⁴ Gollnick, *Religious Dreamworld*, 1.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ Martin Lowenthal, *Alchemy of the Soul* (Maine: Nicolas-Hays, Inc., 2004), 168.
- ⁷ Accardo, *Metamorphoses of Apuleius*, 68.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ Graham Anderson, *Fairytale in the Ancient World* (London: Routledge, 2000), 63.
- ¹¹ Accardo, *Metamorphoses of Apuleius*, 69.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Stephenie Meyer, *Eclipse* (New York: Hachette Book Group, Inc., 2007), 25.
- ¹⁵ C. G. Jung, *Mysterium Coniunctionis (Collected Works of C.G. Jung Vol.14)* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), v.
- ¹⁶ Jeffrey Donaldson and Alan Mendelson, *Frye and the Word: Religious Contexts in the Writings of Northrop Frye* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 54.
- ¹⁷ Gollnick, *Religious Dreamworld*, 101.
- ¹⁸ Stephenie Meyer, *New Moon*, (New York: Hachette Book Group, Inc., 2006), 65.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., 7.
- ²⁰ Lowenthal, *Alchemy of the Soul*, 76.
- ²¹ C. G. Jung, *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, 457.
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973), 160.
- ²⁴ Accardo, *Metamorphoses of Apuleius*, 75.
- ²⁵ Stephenie Meyer, *Twilight* (New York: Hachette Book Group, Inc., 2005), 49.
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ Mircea Eliade, *The Forge and the Crucible: The Origins and Structures of Alchemy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 149.
- ²⁸ Lowenthal, *Alchemy of the Soul*, 109.
- ²⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁰ Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1976), 117.
- ³¹ Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 213.
- ³² Meyer, *New Moon*, 93.
- ³³ Frye, *Secular Scripture*, 99.
- ³⁴ Ibid., 117.
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ Meyer, *New Moon*, 304.
- ³⁷ Marina Warner, *Fantastic Metamorphoses, Other Worlds* (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 1989), 166.
- ³⁸ Ibid., 168.
- ³⁹ Ibid.

- ⁴⁰ James G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (New Jersey: Gramercy Books, 1981), 147.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., 146.
- ⁴² Ibid., 144.
- ⁴³ Frye, *Secular Scripture*, 117.
- ⁴⁴ Lowenthal, *Alchemy of the Soul*, 108.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., 105.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid., 112.
- ⁴⁷ Lowenthal, *Alchemy of the Soul*, 124.
- ⁴⁸ Lyndy Abraham, *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 28.
- ⁴⁹ Frazer, *Golden Bough*, 178.
- ⁵⁰ Lucius Apuleius, *The Golden Asse* (Montana: Kessinger Publishing, LLC, 2010), 28.
- ⁵¹ James Gollnick, *Love and the Soul: Psychological Interpretations of the Eros and Psyche Myth* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1992), 136.
- ⁵² Lowenthal, *Alchemy of the Soul*, 100.
- ⁵³ Ibid., 65.
- ⁵⁴ Meyer, *New Moon*, 234.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid.
- ⁵⁶ Mary Y. Hallab, *Vampire God: The Allure of the Undead in Western Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), 71.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid., 134.
- ⁵⁹ Lowenthal, *Alchemy of the Soul*, 122.
- ⁶⁰ Abraham, *Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, 65.
- ⁶¹ Ibid., 218.
- ⁶² Anderson, *Fairytale in the Ancient World*, 68.
- ⁶³ Lucy Huskinson, *Nietzsche and Jung: The Whole Self in the Union of Opposites* (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2004), 69.
- ⁶⁴ Accardo, *Metamorphoses of Apuleius*, 76 and 85.
- ⁶⁵ Abraham, *Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, 35.
- ⁶⁶ John Granger, *Spotlight: A Close-Up Look at the Artistry and Meaning of Stephenie Meyer's Twilight Saga* (Pennsylvania: Zossima Press, 2010), 115.
- ⁶⁷ Lowenthal, *Alchemy of the Soul*, 69.
- ⁶⁸ Accardo, *Metamorphoses of Apuleius*, 54.
- ⁶⁹ Abraham, *Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, 196.
- ⁷⁰ Eliade, *Forge and the Crucible*, 162.
- ⁷¹ Stephenie Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* (New York: Hachette Book Group, Inc., 2008), 387.
- ⁷² Abraham, *Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, 142.
- ⁷³ Frye, *Secular Scripture*, 163.
- ⁷⁴ Huskinson, *Nietzsche and Jung*, 70.
- ⁷⁵ Gollnick, *Religious Dreamworld*, 123.
- ⁷⁶ Huskinson, *Nietzsche and Jung*, 70.
- ⁷⁷ Katherine H. Shaeffer, 'Stages of Transmutation: The Visual Rhetoric of Alchemy in Sequential Art' (MA Thesis, University of Florida, 2009), 21.
- ⁷⁸ Huskinson, *Nietzsche and Jung*, 70.
- ⁷⁹ Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 354.
- ⁸⁰ Ibid., 376.

- ⁸¹ Apuleius, *Golden Asse*, 105.
- ⁸² Abraham, *Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, 165.
- ⁸³ Ibid.
- ⁸⁴ Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 251-52.
- ⁸⁵ Frazer, *Golden Bough*, 33.
- ⁸⁶ Ibid., 35.
- ⁸⁷ Ibid., 33-36.
- ⁸⁸ Lowenthal, *Alchemy of the Soul*, 104.
- ⁸⁹ Ibid., 110-11.
- ⁹⁰ Ibid., 93.
- ⁹¹ Jeanne-Marie Le Prince de Beaumont, 'Beauty and the Beast,' *The Annotated Classic Fairy Tales*, ed. Maria Tatar (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2002), 89.
- ⁹² Hallab, *Vampire God*, 128.
- ⁹³ Edward F. Edinger, *Anatomy of the Psyche: Alchemical Symbolism in Psychotherapy* (Illinois: Open Court Publishing Company, 1994), 2.

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Book Reviews

Vampire God: The Allure of the Vampire in Western Culture

Mary Y. Hallab

New York: SUNY Press, 2009

177 pages

As a constant fixture of modern society, the lust for vampire literature never seems to waiver. Rising from all threats of grave obscurity, the vampire reemerges in an eternal cycle that mimics the basic nature of vegetation gods. Through this cycle vampires reclaim their rightful place in our modern folklore and literature much like they did in their infancy. This immortality of vampire lore and literature is successfully pondered in Mary Y. Hallab's eminent work, *Vampire God: The Allure of the Vampire in Western Culture*. In *Vampire God*, readers are led through an historical journey where folkloric roots are proven to influence recent literary trends. Hallab recognizes that folklore is still an integral part of our society today and even sees remnants of an older legacy within vampire culture by drawing parallels between the vampire as we know him today and certain historical demigods. This, of course, imparts the vampire with an overtly numinous quality thus exposing Hallab's regard of vampire literature as a symbolic means to understand the mystery of death. Hallab claims it is the pairing of human and supernatural qualities, integral to the vampire's nature, which allows us to contemplate the spiritual mystery of death. The concept of death touches upon topics of a scientific, social, psychological and religious nature and through its link to death, the vampire is associated with these topics as well.

Early folklore was employed as a tool which served a practical purpose: a quasi-scientific attempt to explain natural occurrences. Even in our seemingly advanced postmodern world, there are questions that remain unanswered. The utilization of vampires as an explanatory function for the happenstance of death, of course, proves to be obsolete with science now fulfilling that role. Still, as Hallab notes, early fascination with vampires in Western Europe stems from scientific and pseudo-scientific interests that characterized the 17th- and 18th-centuries. During this time, scientific and occult interests were related to altering perspectives on the nature of and distinction between life and death. Hallab observes a slight change in perspectives during the 19th-century during which time the interest in vampires was equally interlaced with scientific speculations about the nature of life but also with the possibility of prolonging or even creating it. The potential for a prolonged life promised to stave off the inevitability of death, but only for a while. At this point, death may be something science is able to explain but still unable to master. Thus, the concept of death is a subject which is still deeply unsettling.

Even in the modern world, Hallab notes, death has social implications which are acknowledged within vampire lore. Folkloric vampires, for instance, convey a social message that suggests their undead condition is a penalty for deviant behaviour that occurred during their lifetime. This idea of the vampire condition as a punishment for societal deviance is still often embraced by modern writers. Vampires these days, however, seem to be getting the last laugh as they experience a new value amongst our society through a sublime form of awe and respect. As noted by Hallab:

The vampire traits of self-assertiveness, individualism, aggressiveness, even ruthlessness comprise our idea of a successful person as opposed to humility, contentment, and modest reserve.

Perhaps, as the move from creepy vampires to sexy vampires reaches its climax, we will discover the nature of the society we live in and its fluctuating value system. One could deduce that the embodiment of selfishness which was once regarded with shame and disgust, an obvious vampiric attribute due to the parasitic nature of vampires, has now become revered and awed. However, this explanation for the emerging sensuality of the vampire is not the entire picture; it runs much deeper than this as can be explained through an examination of the psychological aspects addressed by the vampire figure.

The beliefs surrounding vampires provides a means of exploring the psychological aspects of death. The idea of the soul, for instance, and its relationship to the body is often a component of vampire folklore and literature. This acknowledges the possibility of the immortality of the soul and the existence of a soul at all, thus alleviating anxieties about death. The natural horror of death, Hallab observes, can also be potentially minimized by personifying it. By attributing death with some human aspects, it becomes more comforting. Hallab stresses the fact that folkloric vampires did not emerge as attractive and elegant aristocrats yet many people believe that the basic nature of vampires is unequivocally sexual. The vampire is commonly interpreted as representing the deviant sexual Other within us that we do not wish to acknowledge. The equation of sex with death was spawned in the 16th-century and is referred to as 'Eros and Thanatos.' It is at this point that images of death are infused with an unprecedented sexuality. This could be interpreted as a way of making death, something terrifying and unknown to us seem less ominous. As Hallab notes, individuals approaching death are oftentimes referred to as courting death or preparing to become the spouse of death. This makes the prospect of death seem more palatable and comforting.

As mentioned earlier, personifying death minimizes the natural horror associated with it. Death can be personified in various ways, as a malevolent devil figure, lover, friend or as a god. A book entitled *Vampire God*, should of course discuss the numinous identification of the vampire and Hallab does this by unearthing the religious associations with the vampire which are revealed through the supernatural origins and godlike powers inherent within the vampire. As simultaneously real and supernatural, vampires cross the threshold between the realms of the living and the dead and thus evoke questions about the soul and a potential afterlife. Hallab notes that the desire of much vampire literature is to convey a sense of a transcendent reality or sacredness because the vampire still carries an 'aura of the ancient god of the dead that was very likely his predecessor.' Hallab continues, 'Like almost all gods of the underworld,' the vampire is also a "fertility deity", a giver of life.'

Hallab identifies the speculations by folklorists surrounding the vampire's ancient origins as gods or goddesses of death, darkness, or the underworld. Hallab also refers to ancient rituals, such as an Easter ritual known as 'Driving out of Death' where a wooden figure is symbolically killed in similar ways to the vampire in the stake through the heart tradition. Knowledge is drawn from the influential book, *Golden Bough* by Sir James George Frazer, where it is noted that gods like Isis and Demeter, amongst others, represent both the death and the revival of vegetation. As potential descendants of these vegetation deities, Hallab notes, 'vampires retain their compelling virility and power—not only that of death, but of life and life-giving forces—as part of their very nature.'

Since the vampire embodies supernatural powers and occasionally manifests control over nature, it emanates a sacred quality that would surround a deity of death and storm as well as vegetation and fertility. The modern vampire, according to Hallab, has reclaimed his position

as at least a minor deity. Hallab notes, ‘Most vampires, like Dracula, rise from death over and over again in an eternal cycle—like gods of the corn and the seasons.’ Also, this does not mean that the Christian God has his work cut out for him. Hallab explains:

Like folklore vampires, most literary vampires are not Satan or opponents of the Christian God. Rather, they have become minor gods of the cycle of life and death in a modern folklore pantheon, often but not always explicitly subordinated to the Christian God.

Hallab’s book remains fascinating and intelligent while exploring original topics that associate the vampire with certain fertility gods and suggest these as potential precursors to the vampire. Hallab suggests that the success of the vampire lies in his ability to address pressing issues regarding the mystery of death. This offers a refreshing alternative to the frequent association of the vampire with illicit sexual desire. Instead, it offers potential fulfilment of an urge to understand possibilities of transcendence. Concerned with what vampires have to tell us about the science, sociology, psychology and overall mystery of death, Hallab unearths the underlying necessity for the existence of vampire lore and literature. A notable quote referred to by Hallab is this, ‘The vampire has assumed the space vacated by God.’ Whether we choose to believe this or not, one thing is undeniable: the entire legacy of the vampire since its inception, from its folkloric roots to current fiction, surrounds the concept of the immortal soul. Therefore, we can conclude from Hallab’s observations, that the vampire primarily addresses all that is at stake for humanity within the mysteries of death.

Heidi Horvath is known to enjoy a good horror novel and is adamant that humans and vampires can live and work together in virtual harmony. She resides in Ontario, Canada with a cat named Snarf and a husband named Bryan.



Bitten by Twilight: Youth Culture, Media, & the Vampire Franchise

Melissa A. Click, Jennifer Stevens Aubrey and Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz, eds.

New York: Peter Lang, 2010

302 pages

The widely and wildly popular *Twilight* books written by Stephenie Meyer have spawned five film adaptations, thousands of web postings of fan fiction and commentary, and countless merchandising spin-offs. *Bitten by Twilight: Youth Culture, Media, & the Vampire Franchise* is a recent book of critical essays that examine the cultural phenomenon of the Twilight Saga, attempting to unravel the meanings and implications of these works within The context of their intended teen audience as well as the ‘crossover’ adult readers/viewers who have also embraced these stories and characters.

Editors Melissa A. Click, Jennifer Stevens Aubrey and Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz divide their volume into three sections. The first, ‘Biting into the *Twilight* Narrative’, is comprised of

essays that examine the themes and messages of the books and films. Of note in this opening segment is an exploration of religious influence within the *Twilight* texts. Margaret M. Toscano argues that although the series draws on Mormon ideology and morality, Stephenie Meyer's treatment of these ideas through the actions of her characters is in fact

subtly subversive of her church's teachings in two foundational ways: first, she invariably puts love before obedience; and second, she rejects the principle that moral purity is maintained by exclusion, by the avoidance of even the appearance of evil.¹

In Chapter Five, Danielle Dick McGeough explores representations of the body in the *Twilight* world, particularly focusing on the transformations that occur to the main character Bella's physical self. Because the series is aimed at adolescent and teenage girls, whose bodies are developmentally in a state of flux, McGeough highlights this facet of the stories as being especially significant for its intended audience. The *Twilight* narrative seems to exist within the flesh of its main character, revealing that '[u]nderneath the theme of romance is a story of a girl who longs to belong, and through bodily transformations, Bella is able to find her place of belonging.'²

Perhaps the strongest chapter in this first part is 'Civilized Vampires Versus Savage Werewolves', in which Natalie Wilson presents a compelling argument regarding the depiction of race within the novels. She points to the binary created between the characters Edward Cullen and Jacob Black as one that operates on several levels, and which belies an implicit understanding of the assumed privilege of the white vampires as opposed to the indigenous Quileute. Wilson's concluding statements aptly point to the potentially troubling racial messages these books portray, warning that '[s]uch depictions, even when situated in fantasy, do contribute to dominant notions of race shaping U.S. culture.'³

Section two, 'Biting into the *Twilight* Fandom', presents a set of studies concerning various trends involving *Twilight* enthusiasts. In her chapter, 'My Mother, Myself', Cathy Leogrande interviewed mothers and daughters that consider themselves fans of the series and found the emotional connections these parents and children made with each other through the fictions to be valuable and unique.

Something in the *Twilight* stories and characters grabbed hold of women, young and old, and made them want to extend their enjoyment by talking about it with others. This seemed to be a key factor in mother-daughter bonding over the series.⁴

Juli Parrish looked at a fan fiction website called *Twilighted.Net* and surveyed the postings of alternate *Twilight* universes as composed by its followers, revealing the impressive variety and creativity of these posters. Jessica Sheffield and Elyse Merlo studied the web postings of *Twilight* anti-fans and discovered, among other things, even these dissenters have clearly read the books thoroughly, and often their negative commentary derives from a genuine affection for the works. Overall, the authors of these chapters recognize a biased dismissal of the gender specific *Twilight* fandom within the larger spectrum of fan followings, arriving at the problematic conclusion that somehow the popularity of these works is discounted because its devotees are almost exclusively girls and women.

Some of these studies include the results of surveys and focus groups. Unfortunately, the authors do not always offer an explanation of the terminology and abbreviations used to tabulate and graph these results. Most puzzling is the chapter by the editors, Behm-Morawitz,

Click and Aubrey, 'Relating to *Twilight*: Fans' Responses to Love and Romance in the Vampire Franchise', which contains a great deal of data and graphs that are difficult to follow. Furthermore, the trends being measured in this chapter, such as 'relational satisfaction of fans who most desired the relationship'⁵ seemed, frankly, extremely vague.

In the third section, 'Biting into the *Twilight* Franchise', the book examines the marketing and commodification of *Twilight*. Chapter Thirteen gives a cogent overview of the strategies used by Summit Entertainment, the film adaptations production company, and how they were able to align fans of the books with the actors who starred in the movies. Comparing the relationship of Bella and Edward to the 'celebrity crush' common to adolescent girls, authors Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, Scott Walus and Melissa A. Click theorize 'that the success of the *Twilight* film franchise is based in large part upon its transformation of relatively unknown actors into teen idols.'⁶

In her enlightening chapter, 'Consumed by *Twilight*', Marianne Martens looks at the ways in which publishing companies are using the ideas and unpaid work of teenage readers who unwittingly engage in veiled marketing research through websites created by the publishers. Martens posits that

publishers exploit teen labor by surveying and manipulating user-generated content for their own purposes, ultimately directing teens to participate in publishers' proprietary digital corrals as book reviewers and marketers.⁷

Finally, 'Touring the *Twilight* Zone', illuminates for us the *Twilight* specific tourism that has sprung up around the real town of Forks, Washington. In trying to make sense of this, author Cynthia Willis-Chun proposes that the girls and women who read the series and watch the films seem to want desperately for their private experience of the book/movie to be extended into their real lives, and that visiting these locations in some way achieves this actualization. She adds that

fans can move beyond the margins of the printed page and the limits of an image onscreen to stake a claim to *Twilight* that those who have not travelled to the sites cannot share.⁸

Her eloquent essay offers an astute reading of the townspeople of Forks' participation in this 'Cultural Tourism'⁹ and of the 'artifacts' presented.

Appropriately concluding this volume is the excellent 'Afterword' by Elana Levine, which contextualizes the arguments presented in the preceding essays, pointing out that '[t]he impact and popularity of the *Twilight* franchise invites, and perhaps even demands, the attention of feminist scholarship on media and popular culture.'¹⁰ *Bitten by Twilight* joins the likes of *Twilight and Philosophy: Vampires, Vegetarians, and the Pursuit of Immortality*,¹¹ *Twilight and History*¹² and *The Twilight Mystique: Critical Essays on the Novels and Films*¹³ in its critical examination of The *Twilight* Saga. What sets it apart, perhaps, is the breadth of its focus, which Levine compares to that of *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature* by Janice A. Radway.¹⁴ According to Levine, both works take a 'multi-pronged approach' to the analysis of popular fiction, striving to understand 'cultural forms in terms of their production and reception.'¹⁵ *Bitten by Twilight* succeeds in this endeavour, for the most part offering lucid insights into the interpretation, function and significance of the cultural sensation that is the *Twilight* franchise.

Notes

- ¹ Melissa A. Click, Jennifer Stevens Aubrey and Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz, eds., *Bitten by Twilight: Youth Culture, Media and the Vampire Franchise* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 21.
- ² Ibid., 98.
- ³ Ibid., 69.
- ⁴ Ibid., 161.
- ⁵ Ibid., 146.
- ⁶ Ibid., 228.
- ⁷ Ibid., 244.
- ⁸ Ibid., 265.
- ⁹ Ibid., 261.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., 282.
- ¹¹ Rebecca Housel and J. Jeremy Wisniewski, eds., *Twilight and Philosophy: Vampires, Vegetarians, and the Pursuit of Immortality* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2009).
- ¹² Nancy Reagin, *Twilight and History* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2010).
- ¹³ Amy M. Clarke and Marijane Osborn, eds., *The Twilight Mystique: Critical Essays on the Novels and Films* (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2010).
- ¹⁴ Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).
- ¹⁵ Click, Stevens Aubrey and Behm-Morawitz, eds., *Bitten by Twilight*.

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Monsters: A Bestiary of Devils, Demons, Vampires, Werewolves and Other Magical Creatures

Christopher Dell

New York: Bear & Company

Inner Traditions Series

192 pages

On the opening pages of his book, *Monsters: A Bestiary of Devils, Demons, Vampires, Werewolves and Other Magical Creatures*, Christopher Dell states that *Monsters* is a ‘testament, to humankind’s incredible, fevered, indestructible imagination’¹ and later that he introduces the readers into a ‘world [that] held more wonder.’² Indeed, Dell’s book does no less. The bestiary is a visual feast not only for art historians fascinated with artistic creativity from a distant past, but also for those interested in monstrosity in general. Dell offers a plethora of stories about embodied evil as it has been penetrating the hellish depths, edges of *mappa mundi*, the pagan underworld and, probably one of the most terrifying regions—the murky bottoms of the human mind.

One has to surmise that by naming his book a bestiary, Dell is using the genre outside of its medieval context, perhaps as a shorthand term for a collection of more or less beastly creatures. He transplants his monstrous hordes from their Christian, moralising, allegorical tradition—in which bestiaries are rooted—onto a multicultural and multireligious plain. He then introduces his monsters and examines ancient mythology, religious lacunae, folk traditions, literature and art from all around the world, with a particular love for Asian cultures. The author recognises the monstrous similarities between the beastly creatures across cultures, but he also points to culture-specific heteronomies, while re-telling the psychomachian conflicts between the supernatural and the human world. He reflects on the monsters’ power, their physique, their strengths and weakness, as well as on some heroes whose valour, masculinity, sanctity or simply life depended on annihilating these abject beings in a kind of rite-of-passage. With that Dell confirms that throughout history, people felt nothing but a mixture of anxiety and an undying fascination with the magical powers of hybrids, chimera-like creatures, monstrous gods and demons. Dell also opines that what is most disturbing for humans is the fact that monsters are not only physically horrifying but they, more often than not, seem to display a disturbing affinity to humans in that their monstrous form is just a bodily shell for human-like consciousness, emotions and passions.

To enjoy stories of fantastic creatures and marvels one does not need a dictionary definition of a monster; yet anyone acquainted with other studies on monstrosity may be surprised with the fact that Dell’s perception of what a *monstrum* is appears only at the end of the book. The author opts for the Latin term meaning an ‘omen,’³ which as Stephen T. Asma explains derives from ‘monere,’ to warn.⁴ Other authors add that it is also related to ‘monstrare’ as in ‘show forth’⁵ or demonstrate, which suggests that the monsters may reveal a message of a supernatural import, coming from God, gods or other divine beings.⁶ In the context of Dell’s study an extensive etymology would be beneficial, the meaning of ‘monstrare’ in particular as it would more appropriately summarise the purpose of the book. Creatures of all sorts are indeed demonstrated in *Monsters* and by ‘capturing’ these monstrous beings by means of representation, for the sake of identification and socialisation, Dell fulfils the function of a true bestiary: edification and instruction. As pictorial representation lies at the heart of Dell’s book, the art historian manages to freeze the marvellous creatures in time for us to look and learn.

The strongest point of *Monsters: A Bestiary of Devils, Demons, Vampires, Werewolves and Other Magical Creatures* is indeed the many pictures showing the supernatural beings

‘having fun,’ which more often than not includes devouring, mutilating, and wrecking the human world. Presenting engravings, woodblocks and handscroll images, mosaics, stain-glass, paintings, and manuscript illuminations, Dell offers his readers a venture into the past of various cultures and the imaginations of past generations. Thus *Monsters* enchants the reader with dozens of illustrations where fantastic creatures are baring their teeth, while piercingly staring at the viewer with bulging eyes. What might be missing here, though, is a closer study of the artistic works he presents. Most readers will not possess the ‘period eye’ and Dell’s knowledge in reading art, both of which would facilitate an even better experience of the monstrous. This could be of particular use with the images stemming from Oriental cultures, which, like the monsters depicted, marvel the reader with the abundance of colour. If, however, the author had as his aim to let the readers immerse themselves into the monstrous art on his or her own, and allow them to make their own judgement of what they see, then indeed the collection achieves this aim. The images stir one’s mind, making one feel pleasantly uneasy, without always knowing why.

Even though Dell aims at giving as many details on particular monsters as possible, there are various times the readers might find themselves wanting to know more, and wonder, for instance, why the particular cultures mentioned by Dell fear the monsters that they do. Though occasionally the book does mention the reasons for specific embodiments (misinterpretations of travellers’ sightings of, what are now easily identifiable animals for example), it would be very interesting to know why in particular cultures monsters take on the forms of serpent-like, avian or wolfish forms, and not others. The fact that hybridity breeds fear and anxiety or that the monsters’ ‘physical appearance match[es] his capacity for evil’⁷ cannot be the only reason for the way they look and act. So is it because some cultures are more afraid of birds than snakes? If yes, then why? Even though the author does indicate at one point that due to human ‘immobilisation’ on the ground, winged beings posed a particular threat,⁸ one wishes to know why this fear is more prevalent in some cultures than others.

For a Christian reader, religious beasts are familiar enough to understand why they act in the particular ways that they do (the chapter on Satan for example); yet while reading the sections on non-European traditions, one wonders, and ‘wonder’ seems to be a very appropriate word here, for instance why the Oriental dragon often has the ears of a cow and always walks on four legs.⁹ Why do Japanese *bakanero* (ghost cats) devour the male owners of households and take their place (and why not women?). Why do Kappa eat cucumbers¹⁰ (and this part of *Monsters* is truly a must-read). Why do Japanese *obake* inhabit household, day-to-day objects, like umbrellas?¹¹ Why are zombies called zombies in the first place?¹² Why is it, a prospective reader could ask, that monsters are so often shown in the act of consuming, and why is human flesh of such delight for them?¹³ Finally, perhaps due to more personal interests of mine, it would be interesting to find out why there so few female/feminine monsters in Dell’s bestiary? Perhaps the book could do with a concluding chapter where some of these issues could be addressed?

Furthermore, what needs to be mentioned is the fact that although the title of Dell’s book promises information on vampires, this information is awfully scarce. Indeed Dell writes about the fanged mouths of various monsters, and the word Dracula does appear in the introductory chapter (‘In the beginning...’), with an additional ‘reminder’ that vampires do not like crosses at the end of the book, but there is no chapter or even a full paragraph on the children of the night. Only one sentence is devoted solely to vampires, and it is rather disappointingly non-revelatory: ‘Vampires are traditionally warded off by garlic and killed with a stake through the heart.’¹⁴ Unless one assumes that by promising vampires in his bestiary the author meant vampire-like features of beings like *kala* from Java (‘bulging eyes, rows of sharp fangs...’¹⁵), *aswang* from the Philippines (‘evil vampire-type creature’ with ‘a taste for blood’ and hatred of garlic¹⁶) and

manananggal (who likewise detest garlic¹⁷); or *jé-rouges*, ‘red eyes,’ a kind of a breed of a lycanthrope (‘who behave *like* vampires’¹⁸), the folkloric bloodsucker does not ‘rise’ from the pages of the book, despite its promising title.

Naturally, Dell never states in his book that his publication is to reveal everything but the reader is dying to know ... and the pun is very intended. Still, this whetting of literary appetite is very clever on the part of Dell. He ultimately prompts his readers to go on a more individual research quest, and to seek answers to all the questions posed while reading *Monsters*. Dell facilitates this endeavour by recommending for example the 18th century *The Night of 100 Demons* by Toriyama Sekien as well as a list of scholarly books for further reading. Throughout the book he also enumerates literary and semi-fictional works which feature many of the monsters he depicts (though no page references appear with his quotes). What the reader might also be interested in is looking up more information about the genre of the bestiary itself¹⁹ to find out more about the allegorical meaning and mystical significance behind some monsters and other fairly benevolent animal-like beings.

So even if Dell’s is a research into the supernatural—beings that are bigger, physically stronger and seemingly omnipotent—it eventually becomes an invitation to a broader study of what it means to be human. He does, I believe, agree with Nina Auerbach’s suggestion that we need our monsters to know ourselves²⁰ and any resistance to this knowledge is not only futile but detrimental. To misquote Alexander Pope,²¹ an eighteenth-century English poet who promoted the reign of Logos, know thy monsters, if you want to know thyself. And as long as authors like Dell bring monsters back to life by re-telling their stories, the search for what is human in the monster and monstrous in the human will be continued.

Notes

¹ Christopher Dell, *Monsters: A Bestiary of Devils, Demons, Vampires, Werewolf and Other Magical Creatures* (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2010), 10.

² *Ibid.*, 138.

³ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁴ Stephen T. Asma, *On Monsters: An Unnatural History of Our Worst Fears* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 13.

⁵ David Williams, *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought and Literature* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999), 4.

⁶ For more see for instance Timothy K. Beal, *Religion and its Monsters* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002).

⁷ Dell, *Monsters*, 46.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 126.

¹² See Marina Warner, *Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors, and Media into the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 359.

¹³ For those interested in the cannibalistic topos in monster-lore Marina Warner’s *No Go The Bogeyman: Scaring, Lulling and Making Mock* (London: Vintage, 2000) offers a thorough answer.

¹⁴ Dell, *Monsters*, 157.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁶ Ibid., 122-113.

¹⁷ Ibid., 138.

¹⁸ Ibid., 121.

¹⁹ Barber's *Bestiary* is a great book to start with. Richard Barber, *Bestiary (MS Bodley 764)* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2006).

²⁰ Nina Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995).

²¹ Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Mankind. Epistle II, in History of English Literature*, in *An Anthology for Students. Volume 1: From the Old English Period to Romanticism*, ed. Krzysztof Fordoński (Poznan: Dom Wydawniczy Rebis, 2005), 453.

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Gothicka: Vampire Heroes, Human Gods, and the New Supernatural

Victoria Nelson

Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012

333 pages

Reading this book made me think of Nina Auerbach's often cited, and often misquoted, dictum, from *Our Vampires Ourselves* that 'every generation creates the vampires it needs.' What Auerbach actually says is

They [vampires] promise escape from our dull lives and the pressure of our times, but they matter because when properly understood, they make us see that our lives are implicated in theirs and our times are inescapable.¹

This is equally true of the uses, and misuses, of the term Gothic itself. In a very general sense then the gothic is generally viewed as a category which signifies anything beyond the normative, but whilst harking back to times 'gone by' is implicitly part of the times that produce its present form. From the seeming ubiquity of the word in much academic discourse around any subject, object or period that is seen as either 'excessive' or 'over-determined' its core meaning would seem to be as miasmic as the many forms of Bram Stoker's infamous Count Dracula who, at will can change from mist, to rats, to a bat or a wolf. And like the vampire king it too can remain eternally youthful and culturally relevant. As such Victoria Nelson's book could, at first glance, appear to be yet another volume that claims the apparent excesses of the early 21st-century, in its many pop-culture guises, as the manifestation of a gothic sensibility. However, her grounding in medieval studies and the history of religion, manage to turn her study into something a little more than that, revealing that whilst some things never change, the timing and the nature of their recurrence can say a great deal about the generation and the culture that produces them.

Rightly so, Nelson begins with a brief history of the Gothic and the particular framework within which she intends to apply it, noting the similarities and differences in its forms from its earlier manifestations and its current usage within popular culture:

All partake of a distinct sensibility with a 250-year-old English literary ancestor, dubbed *le genre noir* by the French but more commonly known as the Gothic, and rendered here as Gothick to distinguish it from the medieval cultural period its first practitioners drew inspiration from.²

This sensibility is that of a culture trying to come to terms with the spiritual nature of the material world. This of course has to be predicated upon the idea that humans are inherently spiritual beings and no matter how much we try to repress that part of our nature, it will inevitably find its way back into the light of our everyday worlds. For Nelson, whose grounding is in religious studies, this would seem obvious and humanity's compulsion, across cultures and throughout history, towards some form of transcendentalism, even through immanence, would seem to justify such a view and indeed forms the thesis of her earlier book *The Secret Life of Puppets*.³ Consequently the linkage, within the western tradition, between medieval and contemporary culture becomes as much a process of psychoanalysis as it does of cultural critique. As Nelson observes:

From its radical (to us) notions of artistic originality to its heavy underpinning of folk religion, the medieval Gothic cultural era of the Catholic European West—whose denizens believed in a material world deeply penetrated by the supernatural as manifested in everyday miracles, saints with superpowers, a feminine divine embodied in the Virgin Mary, a devil with a real tail, and an array of hybrid monsters—provides a richer subtext to contemporary Anglo-American Protestant popular culture than we might first imagine.⁴

This begins to define the subtext of Nelson's book in that contemporary culture, as encapsulated by Anglo-American Protestantism, is subliminally trying to regain what it lost, or repressed from its more openly spiritual past. There is here an inherent danger of an 'us' and 'them' dichotomy arising with a Protestant 'Self' finding a means to transcendence through a Catholic 'Other', to spuriously misuse Emmanuel Levinas et al. Fortunately the author quickly steers this away from such obvious sectarianism by qualifying a particular aspect of her comparison:

Rather I would like to suggest that besides sharing the aesthetic of mad pantextuality, Gothick writers, filmmakers, gamers, and Goth kids of the twenty-first century... are moving intuitively toward an image-based, animistic, supernaturalist orientation that has some common features with the worldview that fueled this older historical substratum of our culture.⁵

Which perhaps more succinctly identifies the increasingly image-based culture that we live in, see Baudrillard et al. and the need for meaning which inherently haunts late capitalist society, see Derrida et al. This meaning, or source of spiritual purpose, has moved its point of focus as the western world has become increasingly secularised. The Enlightenment acts as the 'punctum' for this change, seeing the Sublime, as an expression of human transcendence, move from the wonders of God in Heaven above, to Nature on the Earth below. Once the 'super' in 'natural' becomes earthbound the sacred is no longer tied to just the angels and the heavenly host, as Nelson observes: 'The new 'bright' Gothick in its many forms makes the radical suggestion that if we want to get to heaven, monsters and demi-goddesses can help show us it is right here on earth.'⁶ This then forms the basis of the rest of the book using a series of examples to illustrate exactly how this works.⁷

Using a selection of 'set pieces' that vary between expressions of 'gothick' fandom and examples from popculture Nelson reveals just how the transcendent came to earth, and perhaps more importantly, became fractured into a million different pieces. Chapters on Lovecraftian sects, 'Gothick Gods: The Worshipful World of Horror Fandom', the Hell House in 'The Gothick Theatre of Halloween: Performing Allegory' and a horror film festival 'The Ten Rules of Stiges: Global Gothick Horror and Beyond' show an active involvement in this new conception of the gothick validating the theory behind the creative example cited. These examples range from the literary, as seen in chapters centred on Dan Browns' book *The da Vinci Code*, in 'Faux Catholic: A Gothick Genealogy from Monk Lewis to Dan Brown', and William P. Young's *The Shack* in 'The New Christian Gothick: *The Shack* and Other Cathedrals', to the cinematic in chapters on Stephenie Meyers *Twilight*, 'The Bright God Beckons: The New Vampire Romance', and Guillermo del Toro, 'Cathedral Head: The Gothick Cosmos of Guillermo del Toro'. Between these are chapters on the humanisation of the devil, 'Decommissioning Satan: In Favor of His Man-God Whelps,' zombies, 'Postapocalyptic Gothick: That Means Zombies (and the Occasional Zampire),' and Death and the Maiden, in 'Gothic Romance: The Dance Macabre of Woman.' In all of these one senses that the chapter on *Twilight*, and more specifically Bella Swan, the human turned goddess within it, are the apex, or

synecdoche, of Nelson's wider argument. Her reading is perceptive and the linkage between medieval spirituality and allegory to contemporary 'bright' gothic convincing. The 'new' vampire here partakes of her earlier readings of Satan and popular super heroes, in that they are:

part of an escalating trend to graft the special powers of these creatures [vampires] onto human characters in the same way that comic book writers had previously created superheroes who were ordinary humans possessing a second hidden supernatural identity and graphic novelists were fusing their human characters with gods or devils. The end result in all cases was a hero or heroine possessing something not of this world in his or her deepest biological nature.⁸

The interesting part of this innate godliness that makes all of us potentially 'super'-natural or gods on earth, is that vampirism, or monsterism, becomes the embodiment of individual choice, and it is our acceptance or denial of our natures that decides whether we become dark-angels (heroes) or demons. As the Author observes:

Most broadly, vampirism in the new Gothick seems to function as an emblem of a kind of original sin; it represents the irresistible impulse to evil the now thoroughly humanized supernatural character must struggle against to stay a moral person.⁹

Within the terms of *The Twilight Saga* this is of course seen in the highly moral behaviour of the Cullen family. And whilst Carlisle, as head of the 'clan', would seem to nominally act as the head of this new-age coven or church, Bella shows how important individual immanence is within it. Whilst the sexual postponement, or infinite deferral, of the earlier parts of the saga equate to the genre of 'woman's romance' and medieval courtly love,¹⁰ *Twilight's* denouement in *Breaking Dawn*, sees Saint Bella receiving her heavenly rewards here on earth:

Bella's transition from life to death to immortality is an epic passage. In effect, she becomes Mary and Christ rolled into one, first birthing her half-human and half immortal child [Renesmee] then undergoing a three-day harrowing of Hell—an unbearable sensation of endless, excruciatingly painful burning of her flesh—before she emerges in her new identity (which might equally be read, Old Goth Catholic style, as the assumption of Mary to heaven in her intact body).¹¹

The veracity of this observation is apparent to any of us who have seen the film as the newly turned Bella awakes as a radiant creature; even Beyoncé did not look this good three days after giving birth. Nelson rightly observes the transposition of a heavenly icon, as seen in the representations of Mary ascending to heaven, onto that of a human body that is firmly grounded in the earthly realm. Yet this has been true since Bram Stoker wrote *Dracula* in 1897. Lucy Westenra, the newly turned vampire in Stoker's narrative, is also a new creature, as described by Dr John Seward she had a 'languorous, voluptuous grace ... [with] beautiful colour' making her tempting to those around her, and yet her reward is to have a stake thrust through her heart and have her head cut off.¹² This in itself is indicative of the shift in Anglo-American religiosity that Nelson identifies, for Lucy's sin is not in being a vampire, but in making the wrong choices once she is one. The author perceptively quotes *Breaking Dawn* the novel, when Bella sees herself telepathically through her own daughters (Renesmee) eyes, who

sees ‘both of my faces, hideous human and glorious immortal.’¹³ The god-like nature of Bella is not evil in its own right, nor the path she took to achieve it, it is human weakness and its propensity to do wrong, or sin, that makes its potentially ‘hideous.’¹⁴ Ultimately this creates an oddly ethical godhead, seeing not so much the human in the divine but the human as divine. What Nelson identifies as ‘the religion-making impulse which remains a deep part of American culture’ has been extrapolated onto consumer choice; no longer a ‘one-size-fits-all’ God in heaven but an ‘as-you-like-it’ divinity for all on earth (oddly not unlike the end of the final series of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*).¹⁵ The author rightly points out that this identified shift of universal transcendence to individual immanence is not wholly good or bad:

I think it indicates a kind of nervous ambivalence, certainly warranted given the darkness of the Gothick tradition, about the *mysterium tremendum* itself. What can happen to a person in that moment of mystical connection, judging by these stories, is anybody’s guess.¹⁶

Nelson’s book is a fascinating read. As diverse and as erudite as those by Marina Warner, and which, sometimes dizzyingly moves across subjects and connections. The breadth of the authors reading and knowledge is impressive, though the odd mistake such as Vlad Dracul being the son of Vlad the Impaler, it was the other way round, and the wrong dating of the first mention of Tod Browning’s film *Dracula*, are the minor quibbles of someone who spends far too much time studying all things vampire related. *Gothicka* then, like all good books, makes you want to read more and shows that although times change, human imperatives do not; it is just a matter of degree. The connections the author makes between the medieval period and the early 21st-century also point to an interesting return of the allegorical suggesting that monsters are not just repressed desires made flesh but a way to explore not only our connection to the divine but also our need for redemption; not so much the Fall from Grace but the fall into grace. Continuing Nelson’s own theme of the relevance of popular culture and the Gothick-ness of superheroes, this brings to mind Joss Whedon’s recent film *Avengers*. Here we see the possible consequences of a world inhabited by many superheroes whose differing personalities and talents struggle to maintain any level of collective cohesion. Towards the end of the film the demi-god, and main villain, Loki scornfully says to the representatives of humanity ‘are you that desperate that you need these freaks [the Avengers] to save you?’ To which the answer, as Nelson would concur, is inevitably ‘yes!’ Their freakishness is our freakishness, their frailties are our frailties but their ability to redeem themselves and create their own future is also ours too. The author finishes her work wishing that the gothick ‘never loses its outrageousness or its lowbrow ways ... [or] its ability to push us into new territories that are totally unexpected. Long live Gothick.’¹⁷ To which we can add long live the freaks!

Notes

¹ Nina Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (Chicago: The University Press of Chicago, 1995): 9.

² Victoria Nelson, *Gothicka: Vampire Heroes, Human Gods, and the New Supernatural* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 2.

³ Victoria Nelson, *The Secret Life of Puppets* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

⁴ Nelson, *Gothicka*, 9.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁶ Ibid., 19. There is an interesting comparison here with David Williams, *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Medieval Thought and Literature* (Exeter, University of Exeter Press, 1996), which asks whether the medieval construction, and location of, monsters ‘identifies [them] as God’s only neighbors and suggests their proximity to the Divine?’ (17) A question which Nelson updates and answers.

⁷ A similar thesis forms the basis of Ben Saunder’s book, *Do the Gods Wear Capes: Spirituality, Fantasy, and Superheroes* (London: Continuum, 2011).

⁸ Nelson, *Gothicka*, 131.

⁹ Ibid., 134.

¹⁰ Ibid., 136.

¹¹ Ibid., 143.

¹² Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, 1897.(London: Signet Classics, 1996): 227-228.

¹³ Nelson, *Gothicka*, 144.

¹⁴ This very same dichotomy is shown in the recent *Avengers* (2012) film by Joss Whedon where the characters of Loki and Iron Man both have the power of gods and are both guided by ‘human’ weakness. It is only Iron Mans conscience choice to sacrifice himself that saves him, and consequently the world.

¹⁵ Nelson, *Gothicka*, 56.

¹⁶ Ibid., 263.

¹⁷ Ibid., 266.

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The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous

Asa Simon Mittman and Peter J. Dendle
Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012
558 pages

Like the monsters discussed within, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, edited by Asa Simon Mittman and Peter J. Dendle, is perhaps best initially described as what it is *not*. It is neither an encyclopaedia of monsters nor a compendium of monster studies. Despite including essays that deal with monsters from ancient Greece and Rome to modern cinema, it is not an historical overview of monster studies. It is not a geographically complete discussion of monsters, though it includes discussions of monsters in Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas. Though echoes of, for example, Jeffery Jerome Cohen's seminal 1996 collection *Monster Theory* resound throughout the collection, it is not homage to previous theorists. But it includes elements of all of these things. Therefore, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous* is a hybrid. In that hybridity, it echoes its subject.

The collection is divided into two categories. Part I purports to cover the 'History of Monstrosity' and Part II the 'Critical Approaches to Monstrosity'. These categories are at best loose groupings; the articles in the book are designed to speak to one another and in doing so create quite a bit of overlap. Debra Higgs Strickland's 'Monstrosity and Race in the Late Middle Ages' from Part II, for example, could as easily have been placed in Part I, and Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock's 'Invisible Monsters: Vision, Horror, and Contemporary Culture' from the historical section offers as much theory as history. However, the baggy quality of the organization suits the collection, which sets out to be 'exemplary rather than encyclopedic'.¹ The essays cover monsters from the chthonic to the celestial, deal with physical hybridity and moral deformity, and 'speak of the shifting boundaries between monstrosity and humanity and how the monster can represent aspirations, even heroic ones.'² As Mittman writes in the introduction,

Monsters do a great deal of cultural work, but they do not do it *nicely*. They not only challenge and question; they trouble, they worry, they haunt. They break and tear and rend cultures, all the while constructing them and propping them up. They swallow up our cultural mores and expectations, and then, becoming what they eat, they reflect back to us our own faces, made disgusting or, perhaps, revealed to have always been so ... all "monsters" are our constructions. ... through the processes by which we construct or reconstruct them, we categorize, name, and define them, and thereby grant them anthropocentric meaning that makes them "ours."³

Thus the collection sets out to show the ways in which cultures engage monsters and monsters engage cultures, changing and influencing one another.

Virtually all of the essays in the collection take on the problem of taxonomy: what, they ask, is a monster? Mittman notes that the editors 'encouraged contributors to find their own definitions, rather than to ascribe to our preconceptions.'⁴ This encouragement leads to some perhaps unsurprising similarities among the articles. Several articles dealing with Western monster traditions note, as do Abigail Lee Six and Hannah Thompson, that the term 'monster' generally 'stands as a visible symbol of something important and usually ominous, collapsing two Latin derivations in the popular imagination: *monere* "to warn" and *monstrare* "to show."⁵

Those essays dealing with non-Western traditions, on the other hand, note that the term 'monster' has no clear equivalencies in all cultures. The Mayan crocodile composites under discussion in Matthew Looper's essay were, as he notes, gods or spirits, called *way* by the Maya, meaning 'sleep' and 'dream.'⁶ There is no clear evidence as to whether or not these creatures were feared. Partha Mitter notes that 'There is no single word in Sanskrit that corresponds to the English word "monster", a fact that also reflects a fundamental difference in outlook.'⁷ Dana Oswald notes that 'It is their very indeterminacy, their ability to slide between existing cultural, physical, and social categories, that makes [monsters] dangerous and therefore fascinating.'⁸ According to this collection, monsters defy categorization; this imprecision becomes the defining characteristic of monstrosity.

The first part of the *Companion* 'seeks to contextualize monsters, seeing how they function within individual cultures'⁹ beginning with Persephone Braham's essay, 'The Monstrous Caribbean', which claims that

The monsters of Haiti, the Caribbean, and Latin America are not materially different from the monsters found in other cultures. However, the narratives that emerged at the junction of three cultures under the conditions of early modern globalization established monsters as a preeminent mode of discourse between Latin America and the colonial powers that interacted with it, and ultimately inflected the tropes used by Latin Americans themselves in efforts to explain, diagnose, or correct their eccentricity.¹⁰

Braham offers a good overview of Caribbean monsters, moving from Christopher Columbus to Alejo Carpentier and covering cannibals, Amazons, mermaids, and zombies along the way. The article skips lightly across a deep topic, hinting at depths but never fully exploring them. Unfortunately, Braham occasionally includes quotes without context for readers who don't have a background in Caribbean literature. Overall, though, her claim that 'it is most particularly in Latin America, whose discovery coincided with the birth of modernity, that Amazons, cannibals, sirens, and other monsters have become enduring symbols of national and regional character'¹¹ illustrates the ways in which the Caribbean interacts with its monsters.

Surekha Davies' article 'The Unlucky, the Bad and the Ugly: Categories of Monstrosity from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment' traces the reading of monsters in Europe, discussing three textual traditions of 'monsters as omens, errors, or wonders'¹² and noting that 'The nature of the monster/human divide in the ethnology of distant others was much debated between the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, circa 1400-1800.'¹³ Over the period, Davies notes, 'the category of monster expanded enormously, while its subdivisions became less pronounced'¹⁴ and 'a new liminal category, comprising those beings that could not be definitively identified as either monstrous or normal, became an accepted part of Western thought.'¹⁵

Although an over-reliance on water metaphors in the beginning of this essay makes it seem more precious than it actually is, the third article in the collection, 'Beauteous Beast: The Water Deity Mami Wata in Africa,' by Henry John Drewal, offers a fascinating discussion of the 'snake charmer' image created in late nineteenth-century Europe and incorporated into African reverence of the water divinity Mami Wata.

In 'Rejecting and Embracing the Monstrous in Ancient Greece and Rome,' D. Felton argues that 'The Greek myths repeatedly present monsters being conquered by gods and men; the forces of order, reason, civilization, and patriarchy inevitably prevail in Greek thought.'¹⁶ The Romans, though, became

interested in what they considered freaks of nature, which included not only monstrous animals but also what in their view were deformed and thus monstrous humans, such as dwarfs and hunchbacks. The Roman's predilection for the unusual may have been in part an expression of their expansionist mentality, influenced by the changing boundaries of the Empire.¹⁷

This predilection led to a particular commodification of the monstrous, and '... a favorite Roman pastime was the collection of monster artifacts, many of which were commercial hoaxes, but no matter; they were still status symbols.'¹⁸

Michael Dylan Foster's 'Early Modern Past to Postmodern Future: Changing Discourses of Japanese Monsters' traces depictions of Japanese monsters—specifically the '*yōkai*'—from the Edo period (circa 1600-1868) to Pokémon and claims that they are characterised by abundance and variation; 'controlled' by 'encyclopedic discourse'; and 'infused with a lively sense of playfulness,' which Foster terms their 'ludic sensibilities'.¹⁹ Like other authors in the collection, Foster notes the problem of using the term 'monster' in his essay. The problem of 'the language of Japanese monstrosity' is that in Japanese, the terms for 'monsters' (including *bakemono*, *obake*, *kaijū*, and *yōkai*) tend to be inclusive—for example,

in distinction to many conceptions of monstrosity in the West, the category of *yōkai* is vexingly diffuse. At one end of the spectrum we find phenomenal occurrences, strange events such as poltergeists or mysterious lights. At the other end are somatic *yōkai*, material things and anomalous animal bodies, such as shape-shifting foxes. ... That is, the concept of *yōkai* represents a hybrid of weird corporeality with something numinous or mysterious, a linking of the tangible and intangible, of object and phenomenon.²⁰

Despite this difficulty, Foster deftly discusses the development of a variety of *yōkai* as frightening spirits, movie subjects (as in *Gojira*—or *Godzilla*), or playfully comic artistic figurines.

In 'On the Monstrous in the Islamic Visual Tradition,' Francesca Leoni notes that 'monsters' in Islamic art have rarely been critically discussed and sets out to discuss 'two meaningful and little explored examples—Iblis, the Islamic Satan, and the *div-i safid*, or white demon' in order 'not only to analyze what makes these creatures monsters, but also to consider the specific function or functions satisfied by their being or becoming monstrous.'²¹ Classic images of Iblis, a rebellious angel, show him as literally marginalized, confined to the margins of the images. And as in many other traditions, the monster's physical deformity illustrates his spiritual and moral deformity—despite textual claims that Iblis was beautiful, depictions of him often show him as deformed and naked. Images in epics of the *div-i safid* also depict the monster as naked, thereby showing his 'uncivilized and unaffiliated condition'²² and highlight the fact that the *div-i safid* represents inappropriate human desires. That these images appear in texts intended for the upper classes illustrates that the monsters 'ultimately promoted ideals that contributed to the transmission and inculcation of acceptable social mores and codes of conduct.'²³

Michelle Osterfeld Li's 'Human of the Heart: Pitiful *Oni* in Medieval Japan' discusses the Japanese spirit-creatures *oni* and claims that 'The shift toward *oni* who evoke sympathy occurs mainly in the medieval period (circa 1185-1600), when their potential for spiritual growth is considered. Even as they remain dangerous monsters, the reasons why [these spirits] became *oni* and their potential for change start to matter.'²⁴ *Oni*, something between ghosts and

demons, begin as sheer monsters; the texts that discuss them do not consider the motivations of the *oni*. However, they eventually come to exist as expressions of repressed anger or resentment—their origin becomes significant and ‘*Oni* change once views shift and a Buddhist sense of compassion becomes influential’²⁵ in that ‘they later begin to reveal their own vulnerability and evoke the sympathy of humans.’²⁶ Thus ‘The past and future existences of *oni*, and hence their spiritual development, matter. *Oni* remain monsters ... but come to be increasingly like the people they menace.’²⁷

In ‘The Maya ‘Cosmic Monster’ as a Political and Religious Symbol,’ Matthew Looper argues that images of the ‘cosmic monster’—a ‘composite crocodilian creature that exists in various manifestations or aspects’²⁸—was used to support the reign of Mayan kings: ‘As personifications of the earth and (nocturnal) sky, crocodilians are frequently employed as supports or frames for rulers in order to sacralize the king and to signal his cosmological ritual identity.’²⁹ He argues that ‘For nearly five centuries, great crocodilian beings were rendered in Maya monumental art in order to invest rulers with the powers of periodic cosmic creation and destruction, as well as fertility’³⁰ and that ‘contrary to Western expectations for monsters, these mythical creatures are not typically depicted as violent beings, but are the victims of sacrifice associated with episodes of cosmic renewal’.³¹ In particular, Looper examines the ‘Starry Deer Crocodile’ image that was used to frame portraits of rulers. Similarly, thrones ‘emblazoned with Starry Deer Crocodile imagery were used for royal accession ceremonies’³² so that ‘when seated upon or within an image of this creature, kings were presented as if they were primordial gods, manifesting their sacred duty of destroying, creating, and sustaining the universe.’³³ Terrestrial crocodile compilations, specifically the ‘Crocodile Tree’ iconography, held a connotation of ritual association with cosmogenesis. Looper claims that

While it is unknown if the Maya in general feared these creatures, present data allow that if they were indeed considered monstrous beings, the Maya “cosmic monsters” were a force subdued, their considerable powers subjected to the will of divine kings.³⁴

Karin Myhre also examines artistic representations of animal hybrids in ‘Monsters Lift the Veil: Chinese Animal Hybrids and Processes of Transformation,’ in which she argues that

Especially at the boundaries between familiar and unfamiliar forms of existence—human and animal, Chinese and foreign, life and death—there lurked monsters. Categories of all kinds could be traversed, but in order to maintain social and cultural stability, it was necessary that these traversals be controlled and proper.³⁵

In order to support her claims, she examines *tatoie*—decorative monster masks that embody hybridity: ‘while at first glance features of an animal face are clearly evident, with closer inspection the solid figures tend to break down. A monster’s face may split into two birds in profile or the heads of two dragons. Parts detach from the whole and with horns or quills, for instance, become separate beings in their own right.’³⁶ These shifting images, Myhre notes, allow for transformation.

‘From Hideous to Hedonist: The Changing Face of the Nineteenth-century Monster’ by Abigail Lee Six and Hannah Thompson notes that ‘the monster’s representation and meaning change in the course of the century to reflect—but also to comment on—the literature and society in which he or she is found.’³⁷ In particular, the authors examine the novels *Frankenstein*, *Notre-Dame de Paris* and *L’Homme qui rit* in order to

trace the evolution of representations of monstrosity from works appearing earlier in the century up to its final years, by which time authors have moved away from exploring physical deformity and have begun to pave the way for conceptualizations which we still recognize today, whereby monstrosity, disturbingly, has become invisible and potentially ubiquitous, for it lurks within seemingly normal, respectable people and is grounded in anxieties concerning sexuality.³⁸

Six and Thompson discuss physical and moral monstrosity, moving through these novels and then discussing fin-de- siècle texts, which they claim ‘are interested in the causes of physical or moral monstrosity and their ramifications for society more generally.’³⁹ These texts often

depict monstrous female heroines who prey upon effete and sensitive male protagonists. These heroines’ sadistic and bloodthirsty behavior is rendered doubly monstrous by their subversion of gendered norms, which manifests itself in their sexual voraciousness and their dominant, even predatory actions.⁴⁰

By the end of the century, they claim,

monstrosity was no longer necessarily being viewed as an aberration of nature visited upon the very few, but as something residing within apparently normal, respectable, and respected individuals,⁴¹

and

what all these fin-de-siècle monsters have in common is what, arguably, makes them more frightening than any visibly deformed character: they collectively pose the question of the extent to which monstrosity is containable and concealable.⁴²

Karl Steel’s ‘Centaur, Satyr, and Cynocephali: Medieval Scholarly Teratology and the Question of the Human’ delineates the features of medieval scholarly teratology:

traditional monsters; an exotic setting; an at least implicit presentation of monsters as embodied metaphors; a concern with whether monsters can be converted to Christianity or to some other norm; and finally an attempt to decide whether any given monster should be recognized as human or only as a kind of beast.⁴³

For medieval scholars, monsters were ‘on the edges of ... the civilized world, where nature becomes unrecognizable.’⁴⁴ Teratology was significant in the determination of what constituted ‘humanity’ because

those judged as human would be granted the privileges of humanity: potentially converted and baptized, protected in this moral life as subjects of charity and in the Last Judgment saved from the general destruction of creation and resurrected into bodies that would finally be made right.⁴⁵

In 'Invisible Monsters: Vision, Horror, and Contemporary Culture,' Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock overtly engages one of the ideas underlying virtually all of the essays in the collection when he writes that

The implications of the shifting social constructions of ideas of monstrosity are particularly significant when one bears in mind that what is monstrous is always defined in relation to what is human. ... What this means is that to redefine monstrosity is to simultaneously rethink humanity. When our monsters change, it reflects the fact that we—our understanding of what it means to be human, our relations with one another and to the world around us, our conception of our place in the greater scheme of things—have changed as well.⁴⁶

Weinstock then works to define our own contemporary definitions of the monstrous by making three interrelated claims. First, he claims that there is a 'contemporary disconnection of monstrosity from physical appearance' and that 'looking different is no longer sufficient to categorize a creature as monstrous.' This disconnection manifests in a variety of recent narratives: 'When the "monster" becomes the protagonist and culture becomes the antagonist, ideas of normality and monstrosity must be reconsidered. This trend of "sympathy for the devil" culminates in contemporary narratives such as *The Twilight Series* (both book and film) in which one aspires to monstrosity as an escape from the stultification of hegemonic social forces of normalization.' Second, 'what follows from this decoupling of monstrosity from appearance is an important cultural shift that aligns monstrosity not with physical difference, but with antithetical moral values.'⁴⁷ Weinstock sees this in the form of narratives about psychopaths and terrorists; faceless corporations or government agencies' greed and corruption; unseen yet deadly viruses; and anthropomorphized nature. Finally, he claims that 'one form that the response to the fear that monsters are everywhere takes [is] the construction of nonsensical origins'—the monster 'can never finally be known or captured fully—which is part of its monstrosity.'⁴⁸ Weinstock deftly illustrates these claims with popular culture examples including (among many others) *King Kong*, *Grendel*, *Silence of the Lambs*, *Shrek*, *Aliens*, *28 Days Later*, *The Day After Tomorrow* and *The Happening*.

Part II begins with Patricia MacCormack's essay 'Posthuman Teratology' in which she offers to 'explore ways of thinking [about] posthuman teratology.'⁴⁹ According to MacCormack, 'Human sciences' study of and quest for cures for monstrosity is less about monstrosity and more about preserving the myth and integrity of the base level zero, normal human.'⁵⁰ She notes that 'posthuman philosophy has taken as its task the ethical and creative need to rethink the category of human'⁵¹ and that 'the monster reminds us of the ethical importance inherent in thinking about posthuman aberration.'⁵² Like most other posthuman theorists, she relies in part upon Donna Haraway's discussion of cyborgs, and writes that:

the posthuman emphasizes that we are all, and *must* be, monsters because none are template humans. The human is an ideal that exists only as a referent to define what deviates from it. Just as the monster is predicated on a judgment based upon what defines a normal human, so too, the human is a conceptualized idea which can be figured as a referent defined only through that which deviates from it. ... The monster can simultaneously refer to anything that refuses being 'the human' and that which makes the person who encounters it posthuman. There are a number of ways by which we can conceive this kind of monster. Importantly it emphasizes that referring to a

monster only ever refers to an encounter with alterity. This is so even if both entities could be described (or describe themselves) as monsters because monsters are as unlike each other as they are the non-monstrous.⁵³

In 'Monstrous Sexuality: Variations on the *Vagina Dentata*' Sarah Alison Miller discusses the theory surrounding one particular kind of monster: the *vagina dentata*. She notes that it is 'seductive, engulfing, treacherous, and transforming' and that its bite 'transforms sex, which is an amalgam of pleasure and vulnerability, into a dangerous, bloody, deadly affair.' Thus, she claims, 'the passive pleasurable body becomes the active punishing body, and that slippage of meaning is horrifying.'⁵⁴ Beginning with Scylla, both in *The Odyssey* and in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Miller traces the image of the *vagina dentata* through the figure of Sin in *Paradise Lost* and into modern rape-revenge films such as *I Spit on Your Grave*. According to Miller, the *vagina dentata* has 'semantic flexibility':

Inasmuch as it is able to express a range of assumptions about sex, lust, reproduction, and the female body, the *vagina dentata* endures as a generic monster while remaining adept at articulating the esoteric fantasies of specific texts, persons, and communities.⁵⁵

'Postcolonial Monsters: A Conversation with Partha Mitter' deviates from the essay format of the rest of the collection. In this article, Asa Simon Mittman and Peter Dendle offer the transcript of a discussion with Partha Mitter, the author of *Much Maligned Monsters* (1977), 'about his continued thinking on the subject of the role of the monstrous in South Asian culture, as seen from within and without.' In this conversation, Mitter reiterates his claim that 'In the West, unlike in India, a creature with more than two arms was *contra naturam*, in other words, irrational or monstrous'⁵⁶ and notes that 'My concern here is the monolithic teleology of the Western modernist canon, which is a closed discourse that is unable to accommodate plurality.'⁵⁷

Dana Oswald, in 'Monstrous Gender: Geographies of Ambiguity,' argues that

just as monsters resist social and teleological order, so too do they challenge notions of the body and of gender, blurring the boundaries created by humans to exert some kind of control over the unwieldy world around them.⁵⁸

Oswald traces issues of gender as illustrated by monsters exhibiting hypermasculinity, such as King Kong, and hypersexuality, such as serpent-women. She also examines the ways in which hermaphrodites and the transgendered test the boundaries of 'monstrosity,' noting that

Monstrous bodies and genders reveal that all bodies and genders are somewhere in between rigidly constructed and patrolled categories of sex and gender. While the monstrous serves as a negative category, one meant to confirm boundaries and to warn people to stay within them, it reveals the very superficial nature of these imposed limits, and the uncomfortable ways in which we all fit within them.⁵⁹

'Monstrosity and Race in the Late Middle Ages' by Debra Higgs Strickland contends that

medieval ideas about race also informed conceptions of monstrosity put to relentless service in late medieval representations of Jews, Mongols, Muslims, and “Ethiopians” that continued to influence images of these and still other groups far beyond the Middle Ages.⁶⁰

The inherently visual nature of race and monstrosity leads her to examine medieval art for both.

Chet Van Duzer’s ‘*Hic sunt dracones*: The Geography and Cartography of Monsters’ discusses the beliefs that monsters were created by climate and that they lived ‘at the edges of the earth’—beliefs that prevailed from ancient Greece to the end of the sixteenth century. Van Duzer’s detailed examination of cartographic evidence offers insight into early views of the creation and distribution of monsters. One particularly interesting element is his note that despite its prominent place in popular imagination, the phrase ‘*hic sunt dracones*,’ (‘here be dragons’) exists only on one map and one globe.⁶¹

In his ‘Conclusion: Monsters and the Twenty-first Century: The Preternatural in an Age of Scientific Consensus,’ Peter J. Dendle begins with the publication of the Dungeons & Dragons *Monster Manual* to claim that ‘In a largely secular and self-conscious age, the forms of monstrous past are infantilized, commoditized, and incorporated into the kitsch icons of leisure and entertainment.’⁶² And yet, he notes, polls show that people continue to believe in the supernatural—perhaps in the form of alien encounters and UFOs. Finally, he claims, the ‘monster’ is ‘well suited ... to keep competing discourses of the real an active and open register, even in an age of transparency, technology, and information saturation.’⁶³

As I noted in my introduction, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen’s *Monster Theory* informs virtually all of the essays in this collection, making his ‘Postscript: The Promise of Monsters’ a fitting end for the book. In a beautifully written essay, he offers stories of his own childhood monsters and the monsters feared by his children, then moves through a discussion of Derrida, *Beowulf*’s Grendel, and *Frankenstein* to ask ‘And say the monster responded? What would that monster declare?’ and then answer

... perhaps, most disconcertingly of all, the monster will state its love, its residence within the one whom it addresses, its ardor to be embraced rather than discarded, its future both with and following and as you.⁶⁴

Ultimately, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous* offers an excellent entrance into the study of monsters. It invites a cross-referencing and cross-pollination that the editors don’t take advantage of (the authors might have referenced one another productively, it seems), but the collection nonetheless fruitfully explores a variety of answers to the question of what it means to be monstrous.

Notes

¹Asa Simon Mittman, ‘Introduction: The Impact of Monsters and Monster Studies,’ in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. Asa Simon Mittman and Peter J. Dendle (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012), 2.

²John Block Friedman, foreword to *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. Asa Simon Mittman and Peter J. Dendle (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012), xxvii.

³Mittman, ‘Introduction,’ 1.

⁴ Ibid., 9.

⁵ Abigail Lee Six and Hannah Thompson, 'From Hideous to Hedonist: The Changing Face of the Nineteenth-century Monster,' in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. Asa Simon Mittman and Peter J. Dendle (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012), 237.

⁶ Matthew Looper, 'The Maya 'Cosmic Monster' as a Political and Religious Symbol,' in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. Asa Simon Mittman and Peter J. Dendle (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012), 198.

⁷ Partha Mitter, with Asa Simon Mittman and Peter Dendle, 'Postcolonial Monsters: A Conversation with Partha Mitter,' in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. Asa Simon Mittman and Peter J. Dendle (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012), 333.

⁸ Dana Oswald, 'Monstrous Gender: Geographies of Ambiguity,' in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. Asa Simon Mittman and Peter J. Dendle (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012), 343.

⁹ Mittman, 'Introduction,' 9.

¹⁰ Persephone Braham, 'The Monstrous Caribbean,' in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. Asa Simon Mittman and Peter J. Dendle (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012), 47.

¹¹ Braham, 'Monstrous Caribbean,' 17.

¹² Surekha Davies, 'The Unlucky, the Bad and the Ugly: Categories of Monstrosity from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment,' in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. Asa Simon Mittman and Peter J. Dendle (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012), 52.

¹³ Davies, 'The Unlucky, the Bad and the Ugly,' 51.

¹⁴ Ibid., 73.

¹⁵ Ibid., 75.

¹⁶ D. Felton, 'Rejecting and Embracing the Monstrous in Ancient Greece and Rome,' in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. Asa Simon Mittman and Peter J. Dendle (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012), 103.

¹⁷ Felton, 'Ancient Greece and Rome,' 127.

¹⁸ Ibid., 129.

¹⁹ Michael Dylan Foster, 'Early Modern Past to Postmodern Future: Changing Discourses of Japanese Monsters,' in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. Asa Simon Mittman and Peter J. Dendle (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012), 134.

²⁰ Foster, 'Japanese Monsters,' 135.

²¹ Francesca Leoni, 'On the Monstrous in the Islamic Visual Tradition,' in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. Asa Simon Mittman and Peter J. Dendle (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012), 152.

²² Leoni, 'Islamic Visual Tradition,' 166.

²³ Ibid.,.

²⁴ Michelle Osterfeld Li, 'Human of the Heart: Pitiful *Oni* in Medieval Japan,' in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. Asa Simon Mittman and Peter J. Dendle (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012), 173.

²⁵ Li, 'Pitiful *Oni*,' 196.

²⁶ Ibid., 175.

- ²⁷ Ibid., 196.
- ²⁸ Looper, 'The Maya 'Cosmic Monster'', 199.
- ²⁹ Ibid., 199.
- ³⁰ Ibid., 215.
- ³¹ Ibid., 199.
- ³² Ibid., 207.
- ³³ Ibid., 209.
- ³⁴ Ibid., 215.
- ³⁵ Karin Myhre, 'Monsters Lift the Veil: Chinese Animal Hybrids and Processes of Transformation,' in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. Asa Simon Mittman and Peter J. Dendle (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012), 217.
- ³⁶ Myhre, 'Chinese Animal Hybrids,' 218.
- ³⁷ Six and Thompson, 'The Changing Face of the Nineteenth-Century Monster,' 237.
- ³⁸ Ibid., 238.
- ³⁹ Ibid., 248.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., 249.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., 255.
- ⁴² Ibid., 255.
- ⁴³ Karl Steel, 'Centaurs, Satyrs, and Cynocephali: Medieval Scholarly Teratology and the Question of the Human,' in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. Asa Simon Mittman and Peter J. Dendle (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012), 258.
- ⁴⁴ Steel, 'Medieval Scholarly Teratology,' 261.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., 265.
- ⁴⁶ Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, 'Invisible Monsters: Vision, Horror, and Contemporary Culture,' in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. Asa Simon Mittman and Peter J. Dendle (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012), 275.
- ⁴⁷ Weinstock, 'Invisible Monsters,' 276.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., 275.
- ⁴⁹ Patricia MacCormack, 'Posthuman Teratology,' in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. Asa Simon Mittman and Peter J. Dendle (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012), 293.
- ⁵⁰ MacCormack, 'Posthuman Teratology,' 293.
- ⁵¹ Ibid., 295.
- ⁵² Ibid., 297.
- ⁵³ Ibid., 294.
- ⁵⁴ Sarah Alison Miller, 'Monstrous Sexuality: Variations on the *Vagina Dentata*,' in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. Asa Simon Mittman and Peter J. Dendle (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012), 312.
- ⁵⁵ Miller, 'Monstrous Sexuality,' 313.
- ⁵⁶ Mitter, Mittman, and Dendle, 'Postcolonial Monsters,' 331.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid., 339.
- ⁵⁸ Oswald, 'Monstrous Gender,' 344.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., 362.
- ⁶⁰ Debra Higgs Strickland, 'Monstrosity and Race in the Late Middle Ages,' in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. Asa Simon Mittman and Peter J. Dendle (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012), 365.

⁶¹ Chet Van Duzer, 'Hic sunt dracones: The Geography and Cartography of Monsters,' in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. Asa Simon Mittman and Peter J. Dendle (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012), 389.

⁶² Peter J. Dendle, 'Conclusion: Monsters and the Twenty-first Century: The Preternatural in an Age of Scientific Consensus,' in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. Asa Simon Mittman and Peter J. Dendle (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012), 438.

⁶³ Dendle, 'Conclusion,' 448.

⁶⁴ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 'Postscript: The Promise of Monsters,' in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. Asa Simon Mittman and Peter J. Dendle (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012), 464.

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Theories of International Politics and Zombies

Daniel W. Drezner

Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011

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While instructors have long lamented the presence of zombies in the classroom—the vacant stare, the listless attitude, the want for brains—Daniel Drezner brings the zombie to the front of the lesson as the latest innovation in teaching. Drezner is a professor of international politics at Tufts University and has looked to popular culture in setting up a book length case study predicting the various ways nations would react to a global catastrophe. We speak, of course, of the impending zombie apocalypse. Predictive case studies in the field of international politics usually address threats such as war, economic turmoil, or natural disaster; a zombie apocalypse addresses all these issues at once, creating the ultimate test case through which

international policies can predict survival outcomes. As Drezner comments, 'Zombie stories end in one of two ways—the elimination/subjugation of all zombies, or the eradication of humanity from the face of the earth,' yet Drezner's study shows that an actual zombie apocalypse would not play out in this familiar either/or scenario. Drezner tests theories of Realism, Liberalism, Neoconservitism, Constructivism, Psychological responses as well as Domestic and Bureaucratic responses. In each of these scenarios, humanity survives. But then again, so do the zombies.

In presenting his material, Drezner must overcome one important obstacle: his audience. Or more precisely, his audiences. Early in the book, the reader becomes aware that Drezner is trying to address both scholars within the field and the armchair survivalists, while at the same time pre-empting questions and criticism from the zombie-fan-club. The technique makes for great reading. In one example, Drezner sums up the problem nations face through the zombie threat:

If the past decade of military incursion teaches us anything, it is the dangers of conducting foreign policy with only a facile or superficial knowledge about possible enemies. Traditional tools of statecraft like nuclear deterrence, economic sanctions, or diplomatic demarches would be of little use against the living dead. Zombies crave human flesh, not carrots or sticks.

Drezner then supports his claim with reference to scientific analysis, recent political history, and citations from the zombie cannon. George Romero and Max Brooks are on equal footing with Thomas Hobbes, Adam Smith, and Donald Rumsfeld.

Zombies, as Drezner points out, 'are a transnational phenomenon' and have little concern for borders or geographic boundaries. Before beginning his analysis, Drezner first pre-empt his critics by addressing current 'distracting debates of flesh-eating ghouls.' As any fan-boy will tell you, zombies have traditionally been of the slow and shuffling sort popularized by George Romero's films, setting a cultural standard. It would seem that in issues of international planning, the slow zombie would be the easiest to combat. Decapitate it, or, get out of its way—and then decapitate it. But the *28 Days Later* franchise of the new millennium helped introduce the *running* zombie. Running zombies are more threatening because it makes is that much harder to blame the victim—if you are bitten by a slow moving zombie, shame on you for being in the way. But ff you are bitten by a fast-moving zombie, then shame on me for not having my shotgun at the ready at all times. And plus, I am probably going to be bitten, soon, and by you. So, shame on us all for not anticipating the Olympi-pocalypse. Fast zombies would appear to pose more of a threat, since they have the ability to spread apocalypse faster than governments can react, and to cross borders faster than border patrols can radio for help. Drezner counters this debate with reasoned argument, writing that this discussion is 'largely irrelevant to questions about international relations,' since 'the plague of the undead is likely to cross borders' no matter what sort of zombie is leading the charge. Drezner continues by explaining that whether zombie move fast or slow, they will pose the same sort of threat: fast zombies will not be contained to one geographic region, while slow-moving zombies would also mean a slow moving response. Humans do not take slow-moving responses seriously until the tide is literally at their doorstep and the zombies have walked across the bottom of the ocean.

Like all good sociological studies, Drezner's work begins with a literature survey; this not only sets the base line for the following case studies, but also proves to the zombie-fan-base that Drezner is more than a policy wonk; he is also a well-informed member of the club. We then get into the real work of the book: analysis and case study. Of the four main theories examined, Realism appears to be the one most in operation on the world stage today. Realists

recognize that ‘there is no world government,’ despite what the United Nations brochure might say. Each country acts in its own accord and for its own benefit, so if there should be a zombie outbreak in Canada for example, Mexico will wait and see what happens, and wait and see how it might benefit. ‘In a world of anarchy,’ comments Drezner, ‘the only currency that matters is power—the material capability to ward off pressure or coercion while being able to influence others.’ Realists are not interested in the fate of other nations but in the fate of their own nation, focusing on security and stability within their own borders rather than threats from without. History demonstrates that nations with greater internal resources and resistance to outside incursions survive catastrophe, and are better positioned afterward on the global stage, than their less resourceful neighbors. Through a realist perspective, the zombie plague would play out as follows. Since states look out for themselves, states would first wait to see if other countries step up to take care of the problem first. ‘So even if a powerful state tried to amass an anti-zombie coalition,’ suggests Drezner, ‘other governments might commit to such an alliance in name only.’ Next, less powerful states would suspect that the more powerful countries would use the threat to their own advantage, using the threat as an excuse to advance their more powerful interests. Drezner uses the example of post WWII Europe, when the Soviet Union created a ‘buffer zone between itself and the Western alliance,’ extending influence into border states to create an iron curtain. Drezner posits that a zombie threat would give states like China, for example, the permission to gain territory, extending its protection over Taiwan. Drezner also suggests that in the same manner, the United States could be convinced to extend protection to Cuba. New threats would help settle old scores.

Perhaps most surprising in the Realism scenario is that realists would *not* seek to eradicate the zombie plague completely. According to Drezner, realists would take a live and let live, or die and let die, stance: ‘Realist would advocate non-interference in how zombie state treated their own living and undead populations,’ and then follows with a footnote, ‘Some realists would no doubt warn against the power of a ‘human lobby’ to blind governments from the national interests.’ In contrast, Liberalism holds that cooperation between states is possible to achieve a common good. Despite sounding altruistic, liberals are incredibly pragmatic. As Drezner explains, liberals acknowledge that cooperation is not always contingent on all players participating equally. Some states will benefit as ‘free-riders’ as others step up to combat the problem, and liberals believe that everyone should have the option to opt out. This creates the potential that all players will opt out, so liberals must find other incentives to keep as many players opting in as possible. Incentive is the key word, since liberals will offer trade agreements and other future economic incentives as a means to secure mutual support. ‘Liberals advocate an open global economy,’ argues Drezner, ‘in order to foster complex interdependence and lock in incentives for governments to cooperate.’ Liberals will cooperate with anyone as long as there is a cooperative pay off on the horizon. Drezner describes this pay off as a ‘time horizon’ or ‘shadow of the future.’ The longer a group’s perceived future shadow and future success, the more likely that group is to cooperate with each other, and with other states.

Which leads to a problem. Zombies attack the living, and unilaterally throughout zombie literature, zombies only attack the living. According to Drezner, zombies do not attack other zombies. Drezner quotes liberal economist John Maynard Keynes when he comments, ‘in the long run, we are all dead.’ So in other words, the dead have the longest run, or the longest future shadow. To put it more bluntly, zombies ‘have the strongest of incentives to cooperate.’ Drezner suggests that liberals would also unknowingly spread zombies across the globe as part of their efforts to sustain global trade, and would view the zombie in the same way that they view other problems of global trade, ‘such as money laundering or food-borne diseases.’ Zombies would then become regulated rather than remanded to the grave. Drezner posits a World Zombie Organization set up to manage the multiple aspects of the zombie problem, and

the counter surge of a zombie rights movement through formation of zombie specific NGO's. 'The liberal paradigm,' comments Drezner, 'would be imperfect and vulnerable to political criticism over time—much like the European Union in its current form.'

As popular as Euro-bashing may be in his book, the Americans do not get away so easily in Drezner's critique. In fact, Americans get their own chapter and their own label. Neoconservatives, or neocons, or 'the American Foreign Policy Community' take the best of the realists and the best of the liberals to create a global and hegemonic response to crises. Like liberals, neocons would assume that democracies act on the same side and would cooperate. Like realists, neocons are suspicious of other states and their motives and do not trust policies that appear to shift the power balance away from the United States. Yet, the neocon response would be 'simple and direct.' Drezner explains:

The neoconservative policy response to an uprising of undead flesh-eaters would be simple and direct. Zombies are an existential threat more serious than any clash of civilizations. ... Neither accommodation nor recognition would be sustainable options. The zombies hate us for our freedoms—specifically, our freedom to abstain from eating human flesh.

A response cannot be more direct than that, and the resulting action, as Drezner elaborates, would be one of military intervention to 'ensure the hegemony of the human race.' Drezner images that this would be a shock and awe campaign against an 'axis of evil undead'—which is also the title of the corresponding chapter. Ultimately, however, such a campaign would end badly. Drezner suggests that the indigenous living populations of zombie-infested lands would 'quickly lose faith in the U.S. military's ability ... in the face of appalling costs.' In other words, there would be more shock than awe.

While Drezner addresses domestic, bureaucratic, and psychologic responses to the zombie threat, let's finish this summary by looking at the Social Constructivists. Constructivism is striking because it is nearly a 180 degree shift in position from the neoconservative. Constructivists seek to understand the zombie, and place it in a biological and global context. What is zombie identity? How are zombies socially positioned within the society from which they arise? 'Zombies are hardly the only actors in the social world to crave human flesh,' Drezner explains, 'Cannibals, sharks, and very hungry bears will also target homo sapiens if there is sufficient opportunity and willingness.' So why are zombies considered to be more of a threat? A realist might argue that sharks do not turn their victims into more sharks with a simple bite, and therefor are not as threatening as zombies. Constructivists, however, argue that zombies are a threat because they destabilize the living's sense of identity. Living individuals are seen to act against zombies by creating a code of the living, becoming either more human, or more ruthless. Despite the zombie cannon's depiction of a world descending into chaos, Social Construction suggests that living people will actually get along because they define themselves against the undead Other. 'This shared sense of identity,' suggests Drezner, 'should, in turn, foster a greater sense of ontological security.' More importantly, constructivists would seek to reify the experience by controlling how other individuals interpret that experience, suggesting that constructivist would seek to reproduce their own experience in others so that they would not be alone. Drezner posits that constructivists would seek to destroy every zombie film made so that a false zombie narrative would not exist to perpetuate the zombie apocalypse mythos. In turn, constructivists would also begin to recognize zombies as a distinct social group often oppressed by the living, and in need of their own rights and protections. In some circles, zombies would even become trendy. As Drezner writes, 'As a larger fraction of individuals are converted to the undead persuasion, the remaining humans would feel significant material and

social pressure to conform to zombie practices.’ So, expect to see zombie fashion as part of the Spring collections on the catwalk in Milan, Paris and New York. Zombie would become a social category rather than a social scourge.

Zombies allow Drezner to explain and illustrate the pros and cons of international policies without involving controversial examples like natural disaster, war, or genocide. It also helps that any discussion involving zombies allows for any number of undead puns, sarcastic asides, and entertaining digressions. In fact, the puns are so integral to Drezner’s analysis that they have their own reference line in the book’s index (Bad Zombie Puns, I-128). For those who find themselves teaching international politics, the book will be one way to engage students and generate classroom discussion. For scholars of Zombie Studies, the book provides a new vocabulary for analysis and brings greater insight into both the dynamics of the world stage and the individual zombie film.

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Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature

Dana M. Oswald

Woodbridge, England and Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2010

227 pages

Scholars of the ever-growing discipline of monster studies will be pleased to learn that the fifth volume in Boydell & Brewer’s *Gender in the Middle Ages* series deals exclusively with medieval creatures of dreadful delight. Based on its author, Dana M. Oswald’s, doctoral dissertation, this recent text offers an examination of the construction and suppression of monstrous bodies in Old and Middle English literature, limiting its focus to five ‘case studies’: the *Wonders of the East*, *Beowulf*, *Mandeville’s Travels*, the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*, and *Sir Gowther*. Building on the ‘monster theory’ of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen,¹ which situates the monster of any given period as an embodiment of contemporary cultural anxiety, Oswald pursues the broad argument that the monsters of early medieval texts are ‘erased, dismembered or revised’² in an attempt at suppression and sublimation, while the creatures of Middle English texts are both erased or allowed to transform, and thus permeate into society. Additionally, Oswald offers a development of Cohen’s seventh thesis on monster theory (‘The Monster Always Escapes’) in her discourse through suggesting that a Derridean ‘trace’ of the suppressed creature means that, while the monster always escapes, it also always returns.

After providing an introduction that readers unfamiliar with medieval monsters will undoubtedly find useful, Oswald commences her discussion of early medieval monstrous bodies in the first chapter of the volume, ‘The Indecent Bodies of the *Wonders of the East*.’ Here, it is argued that ‘the sexed and sexualized body of the monster ... is controlled through the repressive act of erasure’³. Erasure, for Oswald, can be the literal rubbing out of a sexual organ

within a manuscript illustration of a monstrous body, either by the original artist or a later viewer; it can be the revision of an illustration ('so that the effect or message of the image shifts'⁴); or it can be the elusive 'never drawing',⁵ in which the artist purposefully withholds from reproducing a sexed or sexualized body part when making a copy from an original manuscript. All three, Oswald argues, can be evidenced through an examination of the different manuscript versions of the *Wonders of the East*.⁶ After establishing examples of erasure in Vitellius, Tiberius, and Bodley, the author concludes that such acts of suppression and sublimation are made in an attempt to remove the 'ideological and reproductive threats'⁷ of the sexed, monstrous bodies of *Wonders*.

From here, Oswald maintains her concentration on early medieval monsters and embarks upon a discussion of the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf* (in her chapter, 'Dismemberment as Erasure: The Monstrous Body in *Beowulf*', which was originally published in *Exemplaria*). Concentration centres, of course, on the erasure of the Grendelkin; Oswald asserts that the 'hypermasculine' and 'threateningly reproductive'⁸ bodies of Grendel and his mother, respectively, are gendered and sexed, and thus necessitate erasure by dismemberment at the hands of Beowulf. This psychoanalytic reading situates the dismembered arm and head of Grendel as 'phallic signifiers,' and Grendel's mother as a 'phallic woman' who 'symbolically castrates Beowulf'⁹ while the two are engaged in battle. The result sees Beowulf not only attempt to erase the sexualized bodies of the Grendelkin through dismemberment, but Oswald also suggests that the hero's 'revis[ion of] what happens in the mere'¹⁰ can be read as a further example of erasure in the Old English poem, and that it is made in retaliation to 'the sexualized nature of the fight'¹¹ between Beowulf and Grendel's mother. As with the *Wonders of the East*, *Beowulf* is convincingly shown in this chapter to embody Anglo-Saxon anxieties regarding the gendered, sexed bodies of the monstrous other.

In the third chapter of this volume ('Circulation and Transformation: The Monstrous Feminine in *Mandeville's Travels*'), the reader crosses the boundary into the late Middle Ages. Here, Oswald argues that, unlike early medieval monsters (which are subject to erasure alone), the creatures of late medieval texts can undergo suppressive and subliminal erasure, but are also transformative beings. She convincingly argues that the potential for such monsters to transform, and thus infiltrate human communities, embodies a medieval 'anxiety about the permeability of human communities and the proximity of the monstrous to the human'.¹² Oswald specifically concentrates on four transformative monsters from *Mandeville's Travels*: a dragon-woman, a reproductive corpse, the self-harming Amazons, and the virginal women whose vaginas may conceal serpents. 'Transformation enables monsters to appear human, and it is this that makes them most monstrous',¹³ Oswald concludes. Thus, while the erasure of the Anglo-Saxon monstrous bodies of *Wonders* and *Beowulf* conceals early medieval anxieties surrounding the sexed and gendered bodies of medieval monsters, the late medieval *Mandeville's Travels* reveals profound concerns involving the potential degradation of society at the hands of the sexualized, female monstrous other.

Male monsters, too, 'embody those fears about miscegenation and procreation',¹⁴ and in her final chapter ('Paternity and Monstrosity in the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* and *Sir Gowther*'), Oswald pursues this argument through a discussion of two Middle English texts: the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* and *Sir Gowther*. As with Grendel in her earlier chapter, Oswald locates hyper-masculinized monsters in the form of the Giant of Mont St. Michel and Gowther, and '[t]he problem of sexual and reproductive circulation'¹⁵ that concerned the female monsters of *Mandeville's Travels* gains further significance through its application to these male counterparts.

Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature offers students and scholars of monster studies a fine discussion on the construction, erasure, and transformation of

monstrous bodies in early and late medieval English literature. It feels accessible enough to suit a reader who might be new to the field, while at the same time offering those familiar with the discipline a number of refreshing perspectives (especially on the *Wonders of the East* and *Beowulf*). Though it would be constructive for Oswald to broaden her already excellent study through a consideration of the presence of monstrous bodies in the non-English literatures of the Middle Ages, this present volume—which is the author’s first foray—is indeed admirable. As the field of monster studies, and especially the study of medieval monsters, continues to grow, it will no doubt be exciting to see how the issues addressed in this volume are further expanded and developed in future work.

Notes

¹ For an overview, see Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, ed., *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); and Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

² Dana M. Oswald, *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature* (Woodbridge, England and Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2010), 24.

³ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ The three surviving manuscript versions of the *Wonders of the East* are London, British Library, MS Cotton Vitellius A. xv.; London, British Library, MS Cotton Tiberius B. v.; and Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley, 614. Differences between the manuscript versions of *Wonders* allow Oswald to accurately pinpoint examples of erasure.

⁷ Oswald, *Monsters*, 65.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 25.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 158.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 159.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 194.

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Foreign Language Book Reviews

Vampire: Monster, Mythos, Medienstar

[Vampires: Monster, Myth, Media Star]

Florian Kühner

Kevelaer: Butzon & Becker 2010

297 pages

Is there any lack of books about vampires, either in English or in German? No. Just try a quick search in the catalogue of your preferred library, and you will get a broad selection of possible spooky literature. Is there a lack of good vampire books? Yes, there is, at least for the German part of this game. But Florian Kühner has now published a book, which is first and foremost a substantial and clearly structured overview but still has some clever detail topics to offer. His study is divided in an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion and an epilogue. Each main chapter is again subdivided in subchapters, and those are again divided up in parts. Unfortunately, the latter ones do not appear in the contents.

At the very beginning, we have on pages 7-9 an 'Einleitung: vom Dorfmonster, das auszog, um die Welt zu erobern' (Introduction: About a Monster From the Village Who Went Forth to Conquer the World). The title shows already the way of Kühner's structure of the book—he starts with the popular vampire belief that entered by several ways and on different paths

the big world outside the South-Eastern European village where he originated. This major line is the fundament for the whole book's structure.

Right after this short introduction, Kührer starts with the first chapter named 'Der Vampir im Volksglauben—ein Monster aus der Mitte der Gemeinschaft' (The Vampire in Folk Belief—A Monster Right Out of the Midth of the Community) on pages 11-59. This chapter is relatively short, due to the fact that he can use here a lot of earlier published material with only a small amount of own research activity. This does not mean that this chapter is a bad one. On the contrary, it is a dense and clear presentation of the actual state-of-the-art of our knowledge about the popular vampire belief. But there is not as much of Kührer in this chapter as in the following two ones.

'Monster der Moderne—der Vampir als Medienstar' (Monsters of Modern Age—The Vampire as Media Star, 61-192) starts with the entry of the folkloric vampire figure into the Middle-European area. Coming from the outer limits of the Habsburg Empire, the first stories about the vampire have been transported around 1725 by the reports of Austrian military doctors first to the offices of military bureaucrats in Belgrade and Vienna and then to the pages of journals and gazettes in half of Europe. Kührer describes this process step by step. A huge plus in this chapter is the global survey of the theme—he does not only describe the way of the traditional vampire from the Balkans to Vienna, but also his way back to South-Eastern Europe. One great example for this can be found in the parts about the vampiristic literature. Of course, Kührer reflects the way from the first mentioning in German pamphlets and Latin treatises to Lord Ruthven and Varney the Vampire, but there is also a presentation of Mircea Eliade's 'Domnișoara Christina' (Miss Christine) from 1936. This small novel is a stunning combination of a more traditional vampire figure (i.e. Miss Christine) with a plot not far away from that of the westernized vampire literature in order to describe and criticize the political situation of Romania in the Mid-Thirties (102-104). The common idea of Vlad Țepeș as the original source of Bram Stoker's Dracula is as well deconstructed (116-125) as the fate of Siebenbürgen (the German word for Transylvania). That romanticized and Romanianized Transylvania of Bram Stoker and his followers is a fictional land and has only the name and the main data in common with the country of the Saxons who lived there from the 13th century on and who created their own world with some of the most important urban structures in that part of Europe (125-132). But unfortunately that fictional land determines the general view of Transylvania in public media and general works about Romania even today.

The third chapter 'Globaler Code und blutige Realität—ein Mythos zwischen den Extremen' (Global Code and Bloody Reality—A Myth between Extremes, 193-261) deals with blood and blood myths as well as the role of women in the Western vampire stories. We learn here a lot about female vampire characters in 19th century novels. But Kührer tells also the story of the construction of Erzsébet Báthory, the 'female counterpart' of Vlad Țepeș. Brilliant are the author's remarks on the use of the vampire as a label or brand somewhere between advertisement for products and racist synonym for foreigners and minority groups (224-242). Here, he can show the widespread and different use of the word 'Dracula', unveiling a parallel to the longlasting effort of the semantically flexible vampire figure in Western literature. The last part of this chapter is dedicated to vampiristic subcultures in our days.

The 'Resümee: vom Monster zum Medienstar—Stationen eines Mythos' (Conclusion: From Monster to Media Star—Stages of a Myth, 263-274) and an 'Epilog' (Epilogue) on pages 275-277 bring the book to a good end. The book contains also an annotated bibliography for further reading, the endnotes and a general bibliography (279-297).

To be honest—the reviewer liked this book pretty much. Even a specialist used to general overviews about the vampire can get some fresh impressions because of the clear view of Kührer on some of the topics... Transylvania was already mentioned as a prominent

example. The book has a clear structure and is written in a flawless style. In addition, it has to be noted that the author makes always a clear separation between the folklore and the Western reception. Therefore, Florian Kühner's book gets a positive recommendation. A very positive one!

Peter Mario Kreuter graduated from University of Bonn (Magister Artium 1997, Dr. phil. 2001) and has working experience both as a scholar and researcher in history, linguistics and ethnography, and as the scientific backbone of radio and TV documentaries about history and popular folk beliefs in South-Eastern Europe. He has published on the popular vampire belief in South-Eastern Europe, on Paracelsus and on the early modern history of the Danubian Principalities. Since 2012 he is a Senior Researcher at the Institute for East and Southeast European Studies in Regensburg, Germany.

Film Reviews

Prometheus

Dir. Ridley Scott, 2012

Twentieth Century Fox

Dune Entertainment

Film, Blu-Ray and DVD: 124 Minutes

Ridley Scott's *Prometheus*, the long-awaited spin-off of the *Alien* series, resembles the shape-changing slime it depicts—it is as messy as it is protean and inventive. Like the alien ooze of the film, the meaning and even basic plot elements of *Prometheus* appear shifting and enigmatic, at times seeming to dissolve under scrutiny. While many critics express frustration with the film's lack of clarity or narrative cohesion, I would argue this open-ended ambiguity reflects and comments upon the themes that animate the film, including the unsettling past of anthropological evolution and the uncertain future of reproductive choice. Responding to the creationism and anti-abortionism of the New Right, *Prometheus* pointedly refuses any easy, theological resolutions to anxieties about biological origins.

Prometheus begins with a stunning sequence depicting an extraterrestrial stranded upon pre-human Earth. The maroon, a tall blue humanoid, consumes poison and falls into a nearby river. As its body blackens and disintegrates, the camera pulls in to reveal that its molecules are recombining to produce new life: the primordial soup bursts out of an alien corpse. While the blue figure presented in this scene seems to have little in common with H. R. Giger's visual style, the notion of a suicidal god vomiting up the source of life captures the spirit of *Alien* creator's work. In the *Alien* designs and the *Necronomicon* collection that inspired them, the Swiss Surrealist renders the sacred as obscenely biomechanical: the alien's elongated skull conflates the priest's mitre with an enormous ribbed phallus. In an affront to Biblical literalism, *Prometheus* returns to Giger's scandalous artworks for inspiration, retelling the creation myth in abject, materialist terms. Inverting fundamentalist dogma, *Prometheus* presents a world in which creation springs forth from decay while intelligent design devolves into a mindless chaos of intermixing genetic material.

The film then jumps forward to the late 21st-century and the beginnings of the interstellar Prometheus expedition, which seeks to discover our interstellar progenitors on the moon LV-223. In a nod to ancient astronaut theorist Erich von Däniken, archaeologists Elizabeth Shaw (Noomi Rapace) and Charlie Holloway (Logan Marshall-Green), chart their destination using an ancient star map found in pictographs and carvings produced by ancient cultures ranging from Paleolithic Scotland to 7th-century C.E. Hawaii. While the archaeologists nominally lead the scientific team, we quickly learn that the expedition's funder, the Weyland Corporation, is keeping a close watch on the crew through android David (Michael Fassbinder) and the equally chilly overseer, Meredith Vickers (Charlize Theron).

David is by far the most compelling character in the film. While the human crew goes into hyper-sleep for the long voyage to LV-223, we watch David fashion himself into the image of an explorer, learning extinct languages and modelling his speech, hair and mannerisms upon Peter O'Toole's mystic T. E. Lawrence from *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962). Whereas Ash (Ian Holm) in *Alien* presented himself as blandly sociopathic, David seems to relish his self-teaching and control, as if a new self-created identity might distance him from his artificial origin and his chattel status. More Gigolo Joe (*A.I.*) than Pinocchio, it is David's almost dandyish affectation that makes him appear human. This calculated pretence, however, takes on menacing

characteristics as the film progresses—David's ascetic detachment develops into cruel indifference. As David says, mimicking Lawrence in an early scene, 'The trick, William Potter, is not minding that it hurts.'

When the crew awakes and lands on LV-223, they find an alien outpost. However, they quickly discover that the underground installation's builders, the space-faring Engineers, have been dead for 2,000 years and what killed them lurks within its corridors. *Prometheus* has received a great deal of criticism for the confusion that follows. After the tense build up to the revelation of the Engineers' ruins, including some landscapes that really reward 3D glasses, both the plot and the expedition seem to scatter. While the *Prometheus* crew appears to abandon scientific protocol, behaving irrationally, their actions follow the tradition of the series' haunted house antecedents. It should come as no surprise, then, when the ship's biologist and geologist blunder around the lunar tunnels, driven by equal parts blind panic and feckless curiosity. Even I found myself wondering why Dr Shaw would allow David to break open a petrified space helmet to extract a severed alien head without so much as a gesture toward preserving the artefact. Nevertheless, their behaviour makes sense when we place the scene in the tradition of Gothic horror rather than hard science fiction. The characters in *Prometheus* are not dispassionate scientific observers dwelling within a plausible future; rather, trapped in an Oedipal scenario, they plunge into the ruins of the uncanny past to uncover a mystery even if it brings about their own doom.

Moreover, many viewers were bothered by the fact that *Prometheus* does not offer clear explanations. It is true that the circumstances surrounding the death of the Engineers, their reasons for creating humans, and their history with the Aliens all remain obscure. In this respect, *Prometheus* owes as much to the original *Alien*'s concept artist Moebius (Jean Giraud) as it does to Giger. In comic book serials like 'Arzach,' Moebius made an art of presenting bizarrely evocative set pieces with few explanations and, frequently, very little continuity. By the same token, *Prometheus* seems to shuttle us from scene to scene, often leaving character motives and connections between events opaque. This often-cryptic narrative is clearly the brainchild of *Lost* co-creator Dan Lindelof, who co-wrote the screenplay with Jon Spaihts. While many summer blockbusters have come to rely too heavily on disjointed spectacles, here the film's incoherence reinforces the sense of confronting the terrifying unknown. This confusion not only allows viewers fantasies to run rampant (Are the Alien's biological weapons, an infestation, or just a stage in the Engineer life-cycle?) but also adds to the sense of Lovecraftian horror (Was the humankind a biological accident, a failed experiment, or an intended surrogate for the Alien species?). The audience, like the film's protagonists, is left to wonder why.

This sense of cosmic dread brings a new dimension to the *Alien* series' long-standing obsession with reproductive horror. *Prometheus*' frequent allusions to Christian faith—including the suggestion that the progenitors of the human species might have had second thoughts about their offspring—place the film in confrontation with the fundamentalist anti-abortion movement. As John L. Cobb points out, the first *Alien* film depicted a female protagonist (Ripley, played by Sigourney Weaver) struggling against an unwanted 'gestating lifeform': 'the fundamental leitmotif of *Alien* is clearly abortion'.¹ *Prometheus* makes this metaphor even more explicit when Dr Shaw attempts to rid herself of an alien pregnancy by demanding a 'caesarean' from an automated medical system. The device, it turns out, is only configured for male anatomy, so she is forced to improvise, instead surgically removing the monstrous foetus as if it were a 'foreign body'. While Ripley in the original series thwarted alien infestations many times, including sacrificing herself along with her alien progeny in *Alien 3*, this is the first time that the series has suggested that someone might terminate an alien gestation and live. In *Prometheus*, alien birth ceases to be biological destiny.

At the same time, the film calls up the spectre of the pro-life movement through Weyland Industries. Dr Shaw's self-administered abortion is opposed by the ship's android, David, who appears enraptured with the idea of meeting the creator to his creator. In the eyes of David, Dr Shaw aborts what may be the child of the gods. (It is no coincidence that the ship's crew celebrates Christmas immediately before entering the LV-233 tomb, or that the explorers discover a mural of a crucified xenomorph.) Later, the film reveals that David's fanaticism for the alien creators is matched by his maker, C.E.O. Peter Weyland (Guy Pearce), who hopes to achieve personal immortality—as well as incredible corporate profits—through extraterrestrial technology. Here, *Prometheus* reflects the connection between Christian fundamentalism and neoliberal speculation in biotechnology. As Melinda Cooper suggests, both financial capital's interest in stem cells and evangelical activists' pleas for the American unborn are constituted by their faith-imbued anticipation of a 'contingent future,' whether that is a potential child or future profits.² Similarly, both David and Weyland aim to sacrifice the present (the actual life of the alien's host) to realize the paradoxical utopian promise found within the beginnings of human life. While Dr Shaw, a Christian, remains hopeful that communion with the Engineers will bring her closer to some divine truth, she refuses to become victim to Weyland Industries.

This incomplete and open-ended futurity may explain why *Prometheus* baffled so many filmgoers. Whereas most prequels resolve questions and explain background details for films further along the timeline, *Prometheus* generates more problems than it solves. Indeed, the final scenes are clearly a teaser for another film that may—or may not—tie up *Prometheus'* loose ends. In this regard, the film's abortive form follows from its content: *Prometheus*, a prequel located in the franchises' enigmatic past, waits to be clarified by a sequel in the speculative future.

Notes

¹ John L. Cobb, 'Alien as an Abortion Parable,' *Literature/Film Quarterly* 18.3 (1990): 4.

² Melinda Cooper, *Life as Surplus: Biotechnology & Capitalism in the Neoliberal Era* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 171.

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Brave

Dir. Mark Andrews, Brenda Chapman, and Steve Purcell, 2012

Walt Disney Pictures

Pixar Animation Studios

Film: 93 Minutes

‘Change your Fate,’ reads the caption on posters featuring a strong, beautiful young woman about to release an arrow. And thus the highly anticipated Disney/Pixar film *Brave* introduced a female heroine who bucks tradition, charts her own course and does so on her own terms. Finally, pro-female filmgoers hoped there would be a children’s movie in which the girl character is not a princess-in-love (Rapunzel in *Tangled*, Snow White in *Mirror Mirror*), not the supportive sidekick (Astrid in *How to Train your Dragon*), and not the brains behind the heroic brawn (Hermione in the *Harry Potter* franchise). At last, the posters promised, we would meet a girl who was the heroine of her own story. That promise, it turns out, was a disheartening bait and switch.

In the most recent iteration of the coming-of-age story manifested in children’s films, a young boy realizes he does not want to become his father, whether his father is a sardine fisherman (*Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs*), a Viking warrior (*How to Train your Dragon*), or a singing penguin (*Happy Feet*). This new model has supplanted the old Oedipal conflict in which the struggle for identity involved learning how to grow into the father’s role, as the young sons do in the *Lion King* and *Bambi*. In more recent films, the father/son conflict often resolves when the father learns to accept his son’s difference. Although the sons often have heterosexual love interests, these storylines effectively queer the *bildungsroman* formula that has long structured much of children’s literature and film. Growing into a man no longer means becoming one’s father. The boy-heroine chooses his own path, convincing skeptics along the way of its worth.

Not so for Merida. Unlike her male counterparts, her resistance to the path allotted to her does not stem from her passion for another way of life. It’s not her love for science, dragons, or even dancing that leads to flat-out fights with her mother. True, she seems to enjoy archery and hiking, but it’s not entirely clear that marriage would make these pursuits impossible. Reviewers at *The Atlantic* and *Jezebel* have suggested that we could read Merida as a lesbian heroine, but the film simply doesn’t support this particular reading. It’s not that Merida isn’t attracted to Prince Charming. No girl—gay or straight—would be enthused by her marital prospects, all of whom are irredeemably doltish and unattractive. Merida’s story is not about resisting the fairy-tale ending women have been trained to embrace. After all, it’s only a

fairytale if you marry a *handsome* prince, an option decidedly not available in this scenario. Thus when Merida says she's not ready yet—might never be ready—for marriage, her resistance translates into a narrative of incomplete, rather than alternative, development. Her desire to thwart her mother's plans emerges as a play for a longer childhood, rather than for a bid to tread a different path to adulthood.

Faced with such unattractive princes, Merida goes for a tearful ride, only to unquestioningly follow will o' the wisps to a witch's den. Without a second thought, Merida makes an unholy pact with a witch. She buys the spell the witch creates and immediately inflicts it upon her mother, Elinor. In a scene that inevitably evokes the proffered apples of other selfish women, Eve and Snow White's evil queen among them, Merida offers Elinor a bewitched cake and remains shockingly indifferent to the physical distress that it causes. After making her ill, the spell then turns Elinor into a bear. Conveniently, Merida's father has nursed a lifelong hatred of bears, thus Merida's act endangers her mother's life and potentially will turn her father into an unwitting uxoricide. In other words, attempting to 'change her fate'—the tagline on every promotional poster—emerges as an incredibly destructive act for her entire family.

Even as Merida tries to help her mother, she does so largely by waiting for the magical will o' the wisps' guidance, rather than her own intelligence or intuition. The 'bravery' and 'archery skills,' touted by the promotional materials are largely in retreat after the opening scenes. She spends the day with her mother-turned-bear, offering fishing advice, but very little in the way of solutions. Later in the film, Merida does give a speech that heals the rift caused by her rejection of the suitors, but only by acting as a literal mouthpiece for her mother. Still trapped in her bear-body, Elinor serves as a furry teleprompter, feeding Merida the exact words that will win over the rambunctious crowd. Eventually, Merida winds up locked in a cell, dependent on her three brothers—who it turns out, have accidentally been turned into bears as well—to rush to her mother's rescue. In a prolonged scene in which Merida tries to keep her family from killing one another, Merida does not succeed through defiance, but through utter surrender. Merida changes her mother's fate by handing over all control over her own, her desires reduced to a toddler's complete dependence on her parents. Once she exclaims, tearfully, that she 'wants [her] mommy back,' the spell is released, and her family escapes the horrible end she had set in motion.

The film's final scene replaces the traditional wedding with another coupling—Merida and her mother happily ride off into the woods together. A generous reading of this plotline might suggest the film offers an alternate, feminine vision of adulthood, one that follows the work of Carol Gilligan and other theorists' move to privilege interdependence over the popular, but illusory, assertion that adulthood is achieved through independence. Yet, as an allegedly path breaking film, and one marketed as such to an audience of young girls raised on fairy-tale princesses, such nuances are eclipsed by the explicit choice the movie offers: you can leave home to get married, or you can stay home with your mother, to whom you owe grateful obedience. Any attempt to chart another course is willful, selfish, and just may result in destroying everyone you love.

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